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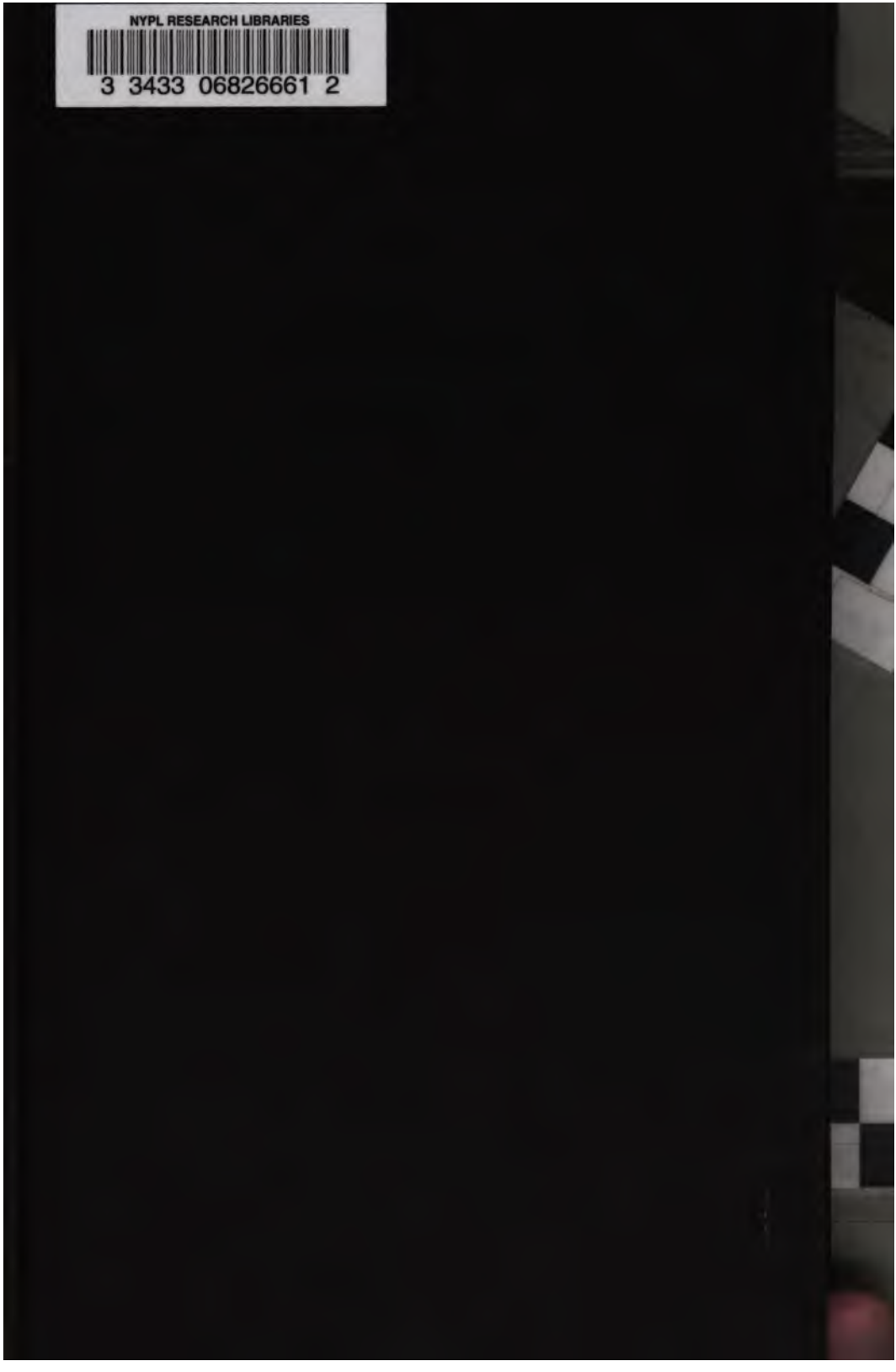
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SERMONS

PREACHED TO A

COUNTRY CONGREGATION:

TO WHICH ARE ADDED, A FEW

Hints for Sermons;

INTENDED CHIEFLY FOR THE USE OF THE YOUNGER CLERGY.

By the late WILLIAM GILPIN, M. A.
PREBENDARY OF SALISBURY,
AND VICAR OF BOLDRE, IN NEW FOREST.

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riches; and it had been early obſerved, that it was difficult for *rich men to enter into the kingdom of heaven.* They were more diſpoſed to the pleaſures, which riches furniſh; than to the comforts, which religion adminiſters: and even they, who had embraced chriſtianity, found much work for the apoſtle in keeping them pure from the contagion, that was ſpread around them.

Beſides the gay, and thoughtleſs, the apoſtle had another kind of people to contend with. Theſe were philoſophers: and tho' they were a more reſpectable ſet of men than the other, they were, at the ſame time, perhaps more intractable. *A ſtate of learning* is in itſelf, no doubt, favourable to religion, at leaſt in a certain degree; and has ever been found ſo: but the *philoſopher himſelf* has ſometimes too much wiſdom to be taught. The Corinthian philoſophers certainly had; and were in general rather inclined to add ſomething of their own to amend the goſpel; than to accept it in that ſimplicity, in which Paul preached it.

To the latter the text alludes. Theſe philoſophizing chriſtians (many of whom were probably teachers alſo) the apoſtle recalls to the ſimplicity of the goſpel. He ſets before them his own example.

ample. He came not, he tells them, *with the excellency of ſpeech, or the enticing words of man's wiſdom.* He knew nothing among them, but *Jeſus Chriſt, and him crucified:* adding, that he had never preached *the words, which man's wiſdom teacheth; but which the Holy Ghoſt teacheth;* comparing ſpiritual things with ſpiritual.

In this paſſage the apoſtle gives us the only true rule of interpreting ſcripture, which I ſhall endeavour to explain, by ſhewing—*firſt*, How the apoſtles were directed by it.—And *ſecondly*, How far it ſeems applicable to us.

I. In the firſt place, the apoſtle tells us, he avoided *the words, which man's wiſdom teacheth.* ——In the apoſtle's days, indeed, man's wiſdom had made but little progreſs in matters of religion. We read of Hymeneus, Philetus, and a few others, who ſeemed deſirous of being *teachers, before they underſtood what they affirmed.* But their number was ſmall.

Man's wiſdom, however, was a kind of leaven, which made a rapid progreſs. We need only curſorily examine eccleſiaſtical hiſtory to ſee it's miſchievous effects. There we find men running ſuch lengths of folly, extravagance, wild-

neſs, and I may add of wickedneſs, that we may well ſuppoſe, it was in the ſpirit of *foreſight*, that the apoſtle puts us ſo much on our guard againſt man's wiſdom. Man's wiſdom hath filled innumerable volumes: the goſpel is compriſed in one.

In this ingrateful field we might wander long. The hiſtory of man's wiſdom is the hiſtory of his opinions; and of theſe there is no end. Zeal, and indiſcretion; pride, and vanity; bad meanings, and good meanings, have all contributed to interpret what the Holy Ghoſt teacheth, by the words of man's wiſdom. Inſtead therefore of wandering in this wide wilderneſs, let us fix our eyes on thoſe great land-marks, which the apoſtle has ſet up to lead us ſafely through it.

The apoſtles were immediately inſpired. They taught, as the Holy Ghoſt inſtructed. Immediate inſpiration *brought all things to their remembrance, whatever their bleſſed Lord had taught them.*

At the ſame time, it ſhould ſeem that the inſpiration of the apoſtles was reſtricted to what was *new* in the religion they taught——or if not wholly new, yet ſo obſcurely ſhadowed out in prophecies, and prophetic types, that it needed

needed explanation. The great truths, with regard to the redemption of the world—the interceſſion of Chriſt—his atonement for ſin—the conditions of acceptance—the univerſality of the chriſtian religion—the motives it holds out—the purity it hath introduced into morals—the certainty of a future ſtate—and of a laſt judgment——were all, no doubt, ſtrongly impreſſed on the minds of the apoſtles, and properly opened by *immediate inſpiration.* In any of theſe great truths, miſtakes were dangerous—memory was frail—and there were yet no written records.——At the ſame time ſuch notices as were already on the records of inſpiration—thoſe divine truths contained in the books of the Old Teſtament—wanted no farther illuſtration from the Holy Ghoſt. Here nothing more ſeems to have been neceſſary, than the uſe of reaſon and common ſenſe. And thus the apoſtle diſtinguiſhes between the things, which God had *revealed by the ſpirit;* and the act of *comparing ſpiritual things with ſpiritual.* The one he calls *declaring the teſtimony of God:* the other was plainly the exertion only of reaſon. Nothing more than the exertion of reaſon was neceſſary to prove the connection between the Old Teſta-

ment and the New—or to point out the completion of prophecies—or to ſhew, how the types of the law were fulfilled. Of this mode of *reaſoning* we find abundant inſtances among the ſacred writers—in the epiſtle to the Hebrews eſpecially.

Thus then inſpiration ſeems to have been neceſſary to direct the apoſtles in what was *hitherto unknown*: but human reaſon ſeemed ſufficient to enable them to *apply* what had been *already* inſpired.

II. Let us then now ſee, how this rule, which guided the apoſtles, appears applicable to us—or in what way we are to *ſpeak what the Holy Ghoſt teacheth, comparing ſpiritual things with ſpiritual.*

In the firſt place, I think, it plainly appears, we have no reaſon to expect immediate direction from *what the Holy Ghoſt teacheth.* To wait for deſultory illapſes of the ſpirit to lead us into truth, ſeems to have little countenance from ſcripture; unleſs indeed we apply to ourſelves ſuch paſſages, as by the faireſt rules of interpretation can apply only to the apoſtles. And ſurely the greateſt caution is neceſſary in ſettling a point,

point, which, if it be an error, tends to confirm all other errors. When a man *reaſons* himſelf into a miſtake, he may reaſon himſelf out of it again. But when a man diſcards reaſon, and ſubſtitutes in its room a divine inſtructor, every enthuſiaſtic notion becomes then immediately ſtamped with the character of divine truth. The ſtrange effects of ſuch wildneſs we have often ſeen.

As far, indeed, as a *holy life* is concerned, we are aſſured every where in ſcripture, that unleſs the endeavours of man are aſſiſted by the Holy Spirit of God, which dwells within him, and to whoſe divine admonitions he ought ever to liſten, *he can do nothing*. Here the divine aid is neceſſary. Man, as a *moral agent*, with all the miſchiefs of the fall about him, ſtands certainly in need of ſupport.

But the *inveſtigation of truth* is a different affair. It was not ſo much his *underſtanding*, that was diſturbed; as his *will and affections*.—*Wretched man!* he knew what was right; but could not practiſe it. To *rectify his knowledge*, enough had been done: inſpired truth was on record; and he had a rule given him to underſtand it. Farther aid would have rendered that

rule unneceſſary; and the expectation of any ſuch aid, enthuſiaſtic.

It is true, indeed, the pious Chriſtian will read his Bible with the beſt effect: and in this ſenſe, no doubt, the Holy Spirit may be ſaid to aſſiſt him in underſtanding the truth of ſcripture: for *he who does the will of God, will know of the doctrine, whether it be of God.* But this is ſtill only the application of ſcripture to the rectifying of his *affections*. To underſtand it as *a ſyſtem of truth*, the rule given us *to compare ſpiritual things with ſpiritual*, ſeems abundantly ſufficient. The New Teſtament is to us preciſely in the ſtate, in which the Old Teſtament was to the apoſtles. It is inſpiration recorded. If farther inſpiration be neceſſary, a written record is more than is neceſſary.—It ſeems therefore fully ſufficient for the underſtanding of ſcripture, to take it into our hands; and, in the ſpirit of ſincerity, and piety, to compare one part with *another*; or with a *general view* of the whole. This ſeems, in the apoſtle's idea, the only key to the ſcriptures.

But now, it muſt be confeſſed, that a variety of cauſes have introduced difficulties into theſe ſacred records; and, of courſe, into the mode of inveſtigation. Ancient cuſtoms not well underſtood—

derſtood—ancient modes of ſpeaking, not conformable to our own—ancient errors, generated in times of ignorance—modern prejudices, and opinions, grafted on texts of ſcripture miſapplied—have united with other cauſes in diſfiguring the plain, and ſimple truths of the goſpel.

Why God ſuffered this *blot*, as ſome may call it, in the ſacred record of truth, we know not. Yet humbly tracing the reaſon of it in the analogy of his other works, we may refer it to the general law of a ſtate of trial. Every thing here bears the marks of the fall. In our moral purſuits we are exerciſed with various difficulties: why not in the purſuit of religious truth? In both we may be aſſiſted, if we apply the proper means. In one, the ſpirit of God will direct our endeavours: in the other, the great ſcriptural rule of *comparing ſpiritual things with ſpiritual.*

The *honeſt application* of this rule, without doubt, would remove at leaſt all the material difficulties of ſcripture. But inſtead of ſolving them in this way, we too often endeavour to adjuſt them by the *words of man's wiſdom.* Hence ariſe all the diſputes, that have divided the church.

The

The opinions which have occaſioned them, however varied, run commonly in two great channels—that of enthuſiaſm, and that of libertiniſm. The enthuſiaſt reads his Bible too literally: the libertine, (I uſe the word in its leſs offenſive ſenſe,) too laxly. The one utterly diſcards reaſon: the other thinks nothing but reaſon worth attending to. The enthuſiaſt loves a myſtery, becauſe he does not underſtand it: the libertine allows nothing to be a myſtery; what he does not underſtand, he rejects.——Let us, in an inſtance or two, apply our great ſcriptural rule to them both.

With regard to the jarring doctrine of faith, and works, it can never ſurely be ſettled by the literal application of a few ſcattered paſſages of St. Paul: but one ſhould imagine it might eaſily be ſettled by comparing ſuch paſſages with *other parts* of ſcripture; and ſtill more by an appeal to the *whole ſcheme of chriſtianity*. The very firſt book of the Bible ſhews us, that the goſpel was meant to reſtore us to that purity of life, which we had originally loſt. This indeed ſeems to be the leading point of chriſtianity; the word of God every where exhorting us to cleanſe our hearts

—to

—to purify our affections—and to transform ourſelves into new creatures.

Now it is certain, all this muſt be done by faith. *Whoever cometh to God through Chriſt, muſt believe that he is, and that he is the rewarder of them who diligently ſeek him.* So that in this ſenſe we may be ſaid to be *juſtified by faith;* becauſe without faith, and its accompanying virtues, no man can attain that righteouſneſs, which the goſpel requires as a proper qualification for our receiving the merits of Chriſt's death. All chriſtians therefore lay a ſtreſs on faith. The great difference is, the *partial* view makes it in itſelf an *end*—the *comparative* view makes it the *means* only of a purified heart, and a good life.

With regard again to an awful doctrine, which we have lately heard diſputed with ſo much freedom; one ſhould think, that a *compariſon of ſpiritual things with ſpiritual*, might lead us here alſo to one point. The whole Bible, Old Teſtament and New, prophecies, and completion, ſeem ſo full both of the humanity and divinity of Chriſt, that one ſhould wonder, how any one, who believes the ſcriptures, could ſeparate the two ideas. If *only* human, how inconſiſtent! Here is a human being, who engages in the arduous

duous taſk of redeeming his fellow-creatures from ſin. We muſt either therefore give up all idea of redemption, of which the ſcripture is every where full—or we muſt acknowledge the total *diſproportion* of the work.—Then again this human being knew the thoughts of man; which is always conſidered as one of the prerogatives of the Almighty. He could forgive ſin; though we all know, that *none can forgive ſin but God alone.* This human being alſo had the power—not only of working miracles himſelf—but of commiſſioning others alſo to work them, which no one ever attempted before. This human being, though cautious in the early part of his miniſtry; yet, as he approached the end of it, ſpoke ſo freely, that thoſe around him declared, *he made himſelf equal with God;* which was in fact the caſe. This human being alſo was endowed with the ſtrange, and wonderful power of raiſing, not only others—but even himſelf from the dead: and not only profeſſed in his lifetime, that he *would* ſend—but after his aſcenſion to heaven, he actually *did* ſend, the Holy Ghoſt upon his faithful followers; communicating to them powers, unheard of before, for the propagation of his religion. In a word, when we take a compre-

comprehenſive view of the ſcriptures, and draw together the innumerable paſſages, in which this great truth ſeems ſo plainly to be contained, it is a difficult matter to conceive how a denial of it is conſiſtent with a belief in what we read. Nor is this a matter to be reaſoned upon, like a point of mathematics, or natural philoſophy: nor indeed does there ſeem a neceſſity to adduce the opinions of this, or that father of the church. The honeſt application of the rule before us, is all that is neceſſary.

There are ſome paſſages in ſcripture again, which are more refractory—with regard, for inſtance, to the fore-knowledge of God; and ſuch doctrines, as are ſuppoſed to be involved in it. But, inſtead of reaſoning upon them, we might ſtill content ourſelves with *comparing ſpiritual things with ſpiritual.* Though we may not be able to obtain complete ſatisfaction from a compariſon with *particular paſſages;* we may ſurely obtain it from a compariſon *with the whole ſcheme* of the goſpel. The goſpel was intended for the general good of man; and God's arbitrary will, can never run counter to his revealed will.—— We act thus in common life. Suppoſe we look into a medical book for the remedy of ſome particular

ticular diſorder; and ſhould there find it preſcribed, that we ſhould mix a certain quantity of ſome drug (a quantity which we knew would prove fatal) with other ingredients—how ſhould we receive ſuch a preſcription? we know well, that the book is intended to adminiſter to our health: but here is a preſcription, which would infallibly deſtroy us. We ſhould take it for granted therefore—either that the drug in queſtion was put by miſtake for ſome other drug—or if the book were foreign, that it was wrongly tranſlated—or that there was ſome miſtake in the quantity perhaps—or perhaps that we might not clearly underſtand the preſcription—at any rate, we ſhould certainly never ſwallow the potion; becauſe it was very plain, that the intention of the book, and the preſcription muſt agree.

Thus the apoſtle's rule of comparing *ſpiritual things with ſpiritual*, will in all caſes direct us right. One part will generally explain another: but if any part happen to be more unyielding, we cannot be far wrong, if we compare the difficulty, whatever it is, with the general ſcheme and intention of the goſpel.—In examining the works of man, as well as of God, we muſt judge from the *whole*, or our judgment will be erroneous.

erroneous. In architecture, for inſtance, ſhould a man ſtand cloſe to a column, and pronounce boldly, that it was too large, or too ſmall, we ſee at once how abſurd a judgment he might paſs. Whereas, if he ſhould ſtep back, take a proper ſtand, and view the whole in one comprehenſive view, he might perhaps find, that the part objected to, was in exact proportion; and the defect not in the object, but in himſelf.—It is often thus in our ſcriptural inquiries: we take a doctrine from a text.

And here I cannot help lamenting the ſingular ill-uſage, which the ſcriptures have met with in being fretted into chapter and verſe, with ſo little attention to the ſenſe. It is aſtoniſhing that the unauthoriſed barbariſm of a printer * (I cannot give it a ſofter name, though he was certainly an able, and a learned man), ſhould be received ſo univerſally through Chriſtendom.—The only advantage, which this ſtrange interruption of the ſenſe of ſcripture *can* have, might have been anſwered as well by marginal references. In the mean time, the miſchief is glar-

* Robert Stephens, who was printing a Concordance, and a Bible at the ſame time, and took this method of adapting the one to the other.

ing.

ing. The narrative, or the argument, inſtead of running on, as in other compoſitions, in a continued diſcourſe, is broken into aphoriſms. In other books the paragraph ends, where the ſenſe pauſes. In the Bible, whatever the ſenſe is, it ends at every third or fourth line. Paſſages, thus inſulated, receive an independent form. The ſenſe in each little paragraph, ſeems drawn to a point; and the *unlettered* reader at leaſt is apt to pauſe. Whereas, if he went on, and took all together, he would find he muſt often affix a very different meaning to the words.

Few judicious churchmen, I ſuppoſe, would wiſh for a new tranſlation of the Bible. It could not ſoon acquire that general reverence, which is paid to the old one. But many, perhaps, would deſire to ſee the errors of the old one corrected; though with as little alteration as poſſible. The ſeveral late collations of MSS. would render this, I ſhould think, no very difficult work. If however the wiſdom of our ſuperiors ſee any inſuperable obſtacle in going ſo far, one ſhould ſuppoſe, at leaſt, there could be none in detaching verſes into the margin. They are certainly unauthoriſed intruders.

Having

Having thus conſidered the paſſage of ſcripture, I undertook to diſcourſe on, and touched, though very ſlightly, a very important ſubject—ſo important, and ſo often neglected, that frequent hints upon it, can never be out of ſeaſon—I ſhall juſt add a few remarks on the difference between *holding* an error, and *teaching* one.

Error is inſeparable from the mind of man. *Humanum eſt errare*, was the honeſt confeſſion of nature; and a ſtate of grace points out the melancholy truth with ſtill greater force. We humbly hope, therefore, that as man and error are ſo cloſely united, God will pardon our innocent errors—I mean ſuch errors, as have no connection with guilt.

But yet our errors, though innocent as far as we ourſelves are concerned, may to others be the ſource of great miſchief. While they continue our own thoughts, they affect nobody: but when we ſuffer them to get abroad, they become clothed in words—and perhaps in ſuch words, as the text calls *the words of man's wiſdom*.

Thus many excellent men, I doubt not, may have carried the doctrine of faith too high. *Them* it injured not; every chriſtian virtue per-

haps flowing from it. In *their* minds therefore the opinion, however erroneous, may ſtill be innocent.—But they fall into a very egregious miſtake, if they ſuppoſe, from their own pious feelings, that this doctrine has always the ſame effect on others. It may create ſelf-deluſion, and I ſhould fear might have a tendency to make men ſatisfied with themſelves. Faith is an eaſy ſubſtitute for a good life. *Faith*, they are ſure, they have; and as to *works*, they hear them always ſpoken of as of no value; which it is poſſible they may be too apt to apply in their own way: ſo all is well. It is certainly a very dangerous thing to ſpeak ſlightly of *works*, leſt we ſhould give a handle to the natural pravity of human nature.

Thus again, with regard to the other important ſubject, on which I touched, as there are many paſſages of ſcripture relating to the humanity of Chriſt as well as his divinity, I cannot perſuade myſelf, (as ſome pious people have done,) that an *exact* faith on this head is neceſſary to ſalvation. Numbers, I have no doubt, will be ſaved through the merits of Chriſt, who conceive him only as their lawgiver, and conſcientiouſly obey his laws; though they

they may not have thoſe exalted ideas of his divine nature, to which our ſcripturral rule, I think, ſo directly leads. If their holy lives have attained the principal end of a better faith, they ought not ſurely to be branded with hard names, and conſidered among thoſe, *who deny Chriſt before men.*

We are ſometimes told they ought; becauſe without this exalted faith in the divine nature of a Saviour, the mind cannot attain thoſe elevated heights of love, which the goſpel preſcribes.—One ſhould think ſo indeed: but before we paſs theſe harſh cenſures on others, let any of us, who do hold that doctrine, aſk our own carnal hearts, whether it purify them in this exalted manner?

At the ſame time, I think, we have good ground to cenſure thoſe, who publicly raiſe ſcruples. Why cannot they be ſatisfied with keeping their opinions at home?—When a man holds a religious opinion with ſuch conſcientious firmneſs, that he gives up his temporal intereſt for its ſake; though the opinion may be erroneous, the man is virtuous: his character reſpectable.—But if, inſtead of ſuffering manfully for his opinion, he ſhould ſet it up as a banner, and

call people together under it; he ſhould then, I think, look well not only to his opinions, but to his motives alſo. There may be a touch of latent vanity—there may be an over-weening of himſelf—the pride of being at the head of a ſect—an oblique view to ſelf-intereſt perhaps—or ſome other undue motive, which may inſinuate itſelf into his religious views. To *propagate* any error, is dangerous—but on diſputable motives, it is doubly ſo. A man is in no way put upon it: of courſe, he is anſwerable for the conſequence. On a queſtion of philoſophy indeed, where an air-pump, or a crucible, is concerned, it matters little: but where religion is the ſubject, it becomes a point of moment. To be ſilent, is at leaſt ſafe. There can be no harm—and I think, no great ſhare of modeſty in keeping an opinion to yourſelf, which has always been oppoſed by a great majority, and ſome of the wiſeſt, and beſt men, both laymen, and churchmen, that ever lived.

But it is ſaid, the examination of truth can do no harm.

None in the world to the truth itſelf. None to the candid, and able examiner. But to the undiſtinguiſhing many it may often do great harm.

harm. To anſwer a bold charge, ſeems neceſſary. But to *keep up the ſpirit* of a diſpute by continually replying to an opponent, who is determined never to yield, ſeems more than is neceſſary. It may unſettle the minds of well-meaning people. It may lead them from things of more conſequence. It may be offenſive to ſee churchmen continually wrangling about points of religion. And though theſe points may often be of little moment; yet they, who know leſs, may think eſſentials concerned; and the goſpel itſelf of an unſtable nature.—Beſides, what was gained in argument, might perhaps be loſt in piety—in charity moſt undoubtedly. Holy wars have ever been the worſt of wars; and ſcriptural debates, the moſt intemperate.—And what end is gained? They rarely convince. People generally hold their own opinions; and the matter ends, as it began *.

After all, the world hath had enough on theſe ſubjects. There is not one of them, which

* Dr. Prieſtley very juſtly obſerves, and is himſelf a notable example of the truth of the obſervation, that "there is but little reaſon to expect, that any man, who "has given the public his opinion on any ſubject of im-"portance, will ever retract it." See his Diſquiſitions, page 206.

hath not been over and over debated. We have only the old argument dreſſed up anew. The ſceptical inquirer cannot poſſibly miſtake his way. The road is tracked by many wheels; and needful guide-poſts are every where ſet up. From the knowledge abroad in the world, he may eaſily find abundance to ſatisfy all his enquiries.

The great concluſion from the whole, is, that the miniſters of religion cannot be too cautious in avoiding the words which *man's wiſdom teacheth*; nor too careful *in comparing ſpiritual things with ſpiritual.* Polemical divinity, no doubt, hath a tendency to lead us aſide. The great point before us is very different. Inſtead of employing our time on the difficult topics of the goſpel, which concern few, it would ſerve the cauſe of the goſpel better, to endeavour by every means, as we are beſt able, to inculcate the important truths of religion, which ſo much concern us all—the intention, and neceſſity of it—its graces, and high offers—its means of purifying our nature—its conditions, and awful ſanctions. Theſe are truths which, though well known, require daily inculcating; and placing in various lights. On examining therefore the whole

whole intention, and tenor of the goſpel—on *comparing ſpiritual things with ſpiritual*, we muſt be convinced, that the greateſt ſervice we can do to religion—and the beſt obedience we can ſhew to the goſpel, conſiſts in our uniting in a conſcientious endeavour to draw a corrupt age to the practice of godlineſs—*keeping that which is committed to our truſt, and avoiding profane, and vain babblings, and oppoſitions of ſcience, falſely ſo called; which too often ſpoil men through philoſophy, and vain deceit, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Chriſt.*

SERMON II.

On the Simplicity of the Goſpel.

[Preached at Southampton, at the Viſitation of Dr. STURGES, Chancellor of the Dioceſe.]

2 COR. xi. 3.

I FEAR, LEST BY ANY MEANS, AS THE SERPENT BEGUILED EVE THROUGH HIS SUBTILTY; SO YOUR MINDS SHOULD BE CORRUPTED FROM THE SIMPLICITY, THAT IS IN CHRIST.

ONE of the firſt objects of apoſtolical fear, in the matter of religious corruption, was judaiſm. The earlieſt converts were Jews; and they could not at once be brought to acknowledge the *ſimplicity that is in Chriſt*. Deep prejudices had taken root; the authority of Moſes—their peculiar privileges—the grandeur of their temple—and ſplendor of its worſhip, had gotten poſſeſſion of their earlieſt conceptions; and had filled their minds with ideas, which were not eaſily eraſed by the ſimplicity of the goſpel.

But

But though judaiſm was the primary object of the apoſtle's fear, the paſſage before us leads us to ſuppoſe, his apprehenſions had here taken another turn, and were rather directed to the temptations of the world.—We may conſider it indeed, if we pleaſe, as prophecy. It has certainly the moſt genuine mark of prophecy—it has been exactly fulfilled. The ſimplicity of the goſpel, in its firſt age, could not be more corrupted by judaiſm, than it has been ſince by a concurrence of other miſchievous cauſes.

In the following diſcourſe, I ſhall *firſt* touch upon a few of thoſe cauſes which have corrupted the *ſimplicity that is in Chriſt*; and ſhall, *ſecondly*, inquire, what part the miniſters of the goſpel ſhould take in this matter. It is a ſubject neither new, nor curious. But if it be a common ſubject, it is, at leaſt, a very intereſting one; and can neither be too often reviewed, nor too deeply impreſſed.

I. To ſee how the ſimplicity that is in Chriſt, hath been corrupted, it may be neceſſary to inquire in what it conſiſts. But the apoſtle hath not defined it; and therefore we may ſuppoſe, we are to gather a definition of it for ourſelves.

Whoever

Whoever reads the holy ſcriptures with the meek ſpirit of a learner, will feel the meaning of the expreſſion better than any logical diſtinctions can explain it to him. He will feel the *ſimplicity that is in Chriſt* growing upon him more, as he becomes more intimately acquainted with the ſcriptures; and by degrees taking poſſeſſion of his underſtanding and affections—he will feel a diſpoſition forming itſelf in his mind, free from the prejudices of any ſect—yet indulgent to the opinions of all—open to conviction—and above diſingenuous cavil—zealous in ſearching for truth—but gentle in maintaining it. He will feel that the ſimplicity which is in Chriſt will form his *heart*, as well as his *opinions*. He will not allow the precepts of religion to be refined by the gloſſes of the world—nor accommodated to its faſhions—nor conſidered as ſpeculative points. His faith will be a directing principle; which raiſes him above the world—above its hopes—above its fears—and forms him into a cheerful paſſenger through this ſtate of trial; animated only by thoſe holy hopes, which the goſpel inſpires.

That there are now, and have been in all ages, many *individuals*, who may, in a certain degree,

degrees, be thus characterized, we have no doubt. But where ſhall we find the *national character* of a people under this deſcription? In early days, when chriſtians were of *one heart, and one ſoul*, we may ſuppoſe, that heart, and that ſoul were truly chriſtian. But as chriſtianity ſpread, its ties looſened by degrees; and an oppoſition ſoon took place between the ſpirit of the world, and the *ſimplicity that is in Chriſt*. This ſimplicity was in a degree tainted, even before the miraculous powers of the church ceaſed; and we may be aſſured the miſchievous ſpirit, which then appeared, has not been idle through ſo long a tract of time; but hath continued extending its influence in ſome countries more, in others leſs, according to the various circumſtances of each. The New Teſtament is the record of the ſimplicity of the goſpel: and modern hiſtory, but above all eccleſiaſtical hiſtory, is the record of its corruption.

The apoſtle of the text is writing to the converts of a trading, and opulent town; not barbarous and uninformed; but enlightened by all the philoſophy, and worldly wiſdom at that time in eſteem. He foreſaw what temptations their peculiar circumſtances would draw them into.

into. Worldly ideas of various kinds—vanity, pride, and ambition—avarice, profuſion, and ſenſuality; in a word, all the arts of raiſing a fortune; and all the arts of conſuming one, he knew, would be continually operating before their eyes: and how the ſimplicity of the goſpel might be able to oppoſe theſe faſcinating deluſions, was the object of his fear.

Again, it might be in equal danger from the refinements of philoſophy; and the acute reaſonings of learned men; who trying its ſimple principles by canons of human invention, and rules of logical exactneſs, would from theſe pronounce boldly on its inconſiſtences, and defects.

The ſimplicity of the goſpel might be powerfully oppoſed too by the ridicule of men of wit; who, taking their topics of compariſon from the faſhions, and practices of the world, might diſplay the folly, and abſurdity of ſuch doctrines, as they were inclined to diſcountenance.

All this was perfectly eaſy: for as chriſtianity and the world were at variance; arguments drawn from the world, and addreſſed to the world, were ſure of being favourably heard.

That theſe were the motives of the apoſtle's apprehenſion, is very plain: for he tells his

converts, he fears, they ſhould be corrupted, as *the ſerpent had beguiled Eve.* To know therefore how that matter ſtood, we need only turn to the record of the fatal deed. *When the woman ſaw that the tree was good for food; and that it was pleaſant to the eye; and a tree to be deſired to make one wiſe, ſhe took of the fruit thereof, and did eat.*

Short as this account is, we find in it a combination of intereſt, pleaſure, vanity, and a falſe taſte for knowledge, all co-operating, through the wiles of the devil, to impoſe upon our firſt parent. With theſe deluſions ſhe was corrupted; and with theſe deluſions we conclude the apoſtle feared his Corinthian converts might be corrupted alſo.

How far our caſe may be ſimilar to that of the Corinthian converts, I ſhould rather leave as matter of inference. All I wiſh to eſtabliſh on *this head*, is, that we are aſſured, on the authority of an apoſtle, that the *ſimplicity which is in Chriſt*, may be corrupted by ſuch temptations, as certainly *do* abound amongſt us—in our manners—in our amuſements—in our literary purſuits; and in our general modes of intercourſe with each other.

II. As

II. As the miniſters of the goſpel make a part of this tainted maſs, we muſt not flatter ourſelves, that we are not, in a degree, corrupted alſo. We read, in early days, of *deceitful workers transforming themſelves into the apoſtles of Chriſt*; and we cannot conceive, that theſe *deceitful workers* are more uncommon now, or theſe *tranſformations* more rare. I mean not however at preſent to purſue ſo ingrateful a theme; I ſhould rather wiſh to inquire, how far we have it in our power to counteract ſuch corruption.

Even to oppoſe this torrent, with any ſucceſs, no doubt, may be difficult enough. To reſtore the ſimplicity of the goſpel is a vain thought. For that great event we muſt wait devoutly for thoſe times in the womb of prophecy, when all offence ſhall be done away.

Some things may be wrong, which the legiſlature only can rectify: and though we acknowledge the difficulty of moving theſe ſacred foundations; yet favourable opportunities may perhaps ariſe, in future time, when a few things, which are now rather offenſive, may be brought nearer the ſimplicity of the goſpel. Many of our ableſt churchmen have freely expreſſed their wiſhes on this head; and as theſe wiſhes become more general,

general, they will of courſe obtain more weight. Eſtabliſhments, however, after all, neceſſary as they are, muſt *neceſſarily* bring on their attendant evils; which ſerious men may bemoan—and in *part* may rectify; but, on the *whole*, they will ever have cauſe to lament, that the *nature of things*, in this corrupt ſtate, is mixed with evil—and that the *nature of man* will turn even his bleſſings into miſchief.

We have alſo greatly to lament, that the manners of the great, are, in general, ſo far removed from the ſimplicity of the goſpel; becauſe the manners of the great will ever be the principal ſource of national manners. It is a happineſs however, that in general theſe vitiated ſcenes are removed from the eyes of the people: and yet enough ſometimes gets abroad to aſtoniſh thoſe, who happily live at a diſtance from them. There is one day particularly, on which the great, and little world are, in ſome degree, on a level; and one place, in which they meet on an equal footing. We have it ever to lament, that ſo pleaſing a harmony—an inſtitution ſo delightfully calculated to inſure benevolence by united devotion through the whole maſs of the people, ſhould be ſo generally diſregarded. Even the very

very political uſe of this ſacred inſtitution, if it had no other, were ſufficient to inforce a general obſervance of it on all, who have a love for public order. But the great ſhould conſider farther, that if *they* have no need of inſtruction —their *inferiors* at leaſt have; who are always ready, on this, and every occaſion, to ſhew their betters, how much they approve, and value the bad examples they ſet them.

Let things however be wrong in what degree they will—let the great and little world unite in treating the *ſimplicity that is in Chriſt* with what contempt they pleaſe, it is ſtill our part to do our beſt to preſerve it; and to keep the remains of religion, as far as we can, and as long as we can, ſubſiſting amongſt us. Though the *whole head is ſick, and the heart faint*, and the phyſician's beſt ſkill can only palliate; it is always ſomething to go ſo far. Though our influence cannot preſerve the whole, yet ſtill it may preſerve a part. Though we may have no effect on the general bulk of mankind; yet there may be many an individual, whoſe honeſt heart we may retain in the ſimplicity of the goſpel.

We are not legiſlators, my brethren; and I doubt whether things would not go better if we were

were. The only means, which we have to employ in this matter, lie in two eaſy words, our *doctrine*, and our *manners*; in both of which it ſhould be our utmoſt endeavour to attain, as far as we can, and to impreſs upon others, the *ſimplicity that is in Chriſt*. The former, we muſt endeavour to preſerve from the corruptions of *worldly wiſdom*; the latter from the corruptions of *worldly faſhions*.

To *explain the word of God*, is certainly the moſt arduous buſineſs in which the reaſon of man can engage. Every explanation of the ſacred text is, in fact, putting our own ſenſe upon the words of ſcripture: and when we conſider the very ſupine ignorance of the generality of the common people, who take their ideas of religion from *what we tell them*; it is certainly a very awful thought, and ſhould make us endeavour to keep as cloſe as poſſible to the *ſimplicity, that is in Chriſt*.

It is in vain to attempt this without a thorough acquaintance with ſcripture; which will always ſuggeſt ſuch paſſages to the memory, as, on a compariſon with the ſubject we are upon, may direct us to the true ſcriptural ſenſe.

The lawyer is obliged to ſtudy with attention a number of books, and to examine a variety of parallel caſes, before he can be qualified to act in his profeſſion. The phyſician is under the ſame neceſſity. And it is a mortifying conſideration, that becauſe the common people are obliged to take our preſcriptions, juſt as we pleaſe to preſcribe, we ſhould for that reaſon preſcribe careleſsly; and without ſufficiently conſulting that book, from which alone we can procure the true ingredients.

Some think the *ſimplicity, that is in Chriſt*, conſiſts in clothing their ſentiments always in *ſcripture-phraſe*. I ſee no more reaſon for this, than for going about, as the apoſtles did, in ſandals, with a ſcrip, and a ſtaff. Modes of ſpeech are juſt as much the faſhion of times, and countries, as modes of dreſs; and need be as little obſerved. The ſcriptural mode of ſpeech is highly figurative—very different from any mode now in uſe; and requires tranſlation, as much as the original Greek. It is the *ſcriptural idea*, not the *ſcriptural mode of expreſſion*, for which we contend: and this may be loſt in many ways. It may be narrowed to ſpeak the

opinions

opinions of a ſect—or, it may be widened to ſpeak the opinions of the world—or, it may be loſt in morals; when inſtead of preaching plainly, and ſimply on goſpel-ſubjects, and goſpel-motives, our diſcourſes, with ſcriptural mottoes affixed, are ſhort immethodical eſſays, in which the beginning can hardly be diſtinguiſhed from the end—nor indeed what is aimed at, till the book is cloſed, juſt as the audience may ſuppoſe the ſubject will open.

There is another thing alſo, which often occaſions our erring from the *ſimplicity, which is in Chriſt.* As the goſpel is a covenant between God and man, it touches, of courſe, on ſuch things, as relate to both. As far as it relates to God, it is, no doubt, a deep, myſterious ſubject; but as far as it relates to man, nothing can be more ſimple, and eaſy. Hence it is, that our religion, without any contradiction of terms, (peace be to all ſceptical cavils!) is ſometimes called the *myſtery of godlineſs;* and ſometimes the *ſimplicity of the goſpel.* It is the *myſtery of godlineſs,* as it relates to God's part in this gracious plan; and the *ſimplicity of the goſpel,* as it relates to us. To the want of ſufficient attention to this eaſy diſtinction perhaps ariſe not only many

of the diſputes, and miſconceptions, and infuſions of worldly wiſdom, which have ſo often diſgraced the goſpel: but alſo much of that ſtrange, unaccountable confuſion of ideas, that perplexes, and confounds the underſtanding of the lower people. If the loſt condition of man—his reſtoration, and redemption by Chriſt—the neceſſity of a holy life through faith—the tendency of the goſpel to make him happy both here, and hereafter—and other plain points, had generally been the ſubjects of popular diſcourſes, we ſhould not have had now that groſs ignorance in matters of religion, and that variety of ſtrange notions, and prejudices to combat, which we find amongſt the common people, on all religious ſubjects; but eſpecially on the ſacrament of the Lord's ſupper. As nothing is more difficult than to eradicate old prejudices; nothing would have been more eaſy than to have prevented their getting ground at firſt. The plain truths of the goſpel might have deſcended juſt as eaſily as miſconception and error have done ſince.

It ſhould be our care then to accommodate our doctrine, as much as we can, to the *ſimplicity that is in Chriſt*—not to dwell upon its

myſterious

myſterious parts—not to enter into the inquiries, how? and why?—nor to clog it with difficult, or refined queſtions; againſt which the apoſtle to Timothy, long ago, took abundant pains to guard us; but to preach it, as we are directed, with plainneſs—to lay the ſtreſs on its obvious truths—and when we have occaſion to mention a myſterious point, (one of thoſe great points, which relate to God's part in the covenant of grace, rather than to man's,) to be careful of going too far—to keep as cloſe as poſſible to ſcripture, leſt we make a difficulty more difficult by endeavouring to explain, what cannot be explained. The leſs, in general, that is ſaid on ſuch points, the better. One thing we ſhould always remember; and that is to adapt our diſcourſes to the *lower*, rather than the *higher* parts of our audience; that we may, like good miniſters, diſpenſe that goſpel, whoſe peculiar character it was, to *be preached to the poor*.

I ſhall cloſe this head, with the account, which an ancient heathen of the fourth century gives of the mode of preaching the goſpel in his day: "The chriſtian philoſophy," ſays he, "is very "ſimple. Its principal concern is to regulate "the manners of men, and to infuſe worthy

" notions of the Deity. Obſcure queſtions, and " nice arguments, it avoids. Nor does it enter " into the nature and foundation of virtue: but " exhorts, in general, to the practice of it; " which experience ſhews us is more effectual " among the vulgar *."

Our *manners* ſhould be as ſimple as our *doctrine*.

But you aſk, what is ſimplicity of manners? It is a phraſe of ambiguous meaning.

Let us not here again puzzle ourſelves with definitions. They who ſeek for cloſe definitions on theſe ſubjects, I ſhould fear, ſeek rather for evaſion, than information. The ſcriptures have little to do with definitions. On theſe ſubjects, they ſpeak to the heart, more than to the head. Whoever reads, with a deſire to learn, the inſtructions which our Saviour and his apoſtles give to the miniſters of the goſpel, will ſoon feel —unleſs indeed it be a point which he wiſhes to overlook,—not only in what the ſimplicity of our manners ſhould conſiſt—but alſo, that it ſhould be our firſt, and moſt indiſpenſable care.

* See Lardner's Teſtimonies from Alexander of Lycopolis. Vol. IV. p. 11.

And

And the reaſon of the thing, as we are preachers of the goſpel, is plain; becauſe the ſimplicity of our manners muſt give force to what we ſay. It is not every body, with his beſt endeavour, who can get hold of the propereſt method of communicating his ideas, or can practiſe that mode of application in his diſcourſes, either publicly or privately, which may have the beſt effect upon the people. But ſimplicity of manners is a mode of preaching, which makes up many defects—it is adapted to every capacity—every body underſtands it; and it adds a dignity, and conſequence even to a diſcourſe of leſs weight. Though the common people are no good reaſoners, there is however one mode of reaſoning, at which they are very ready—that of inferring *doctrine* from *manners*: and they will not only make the latter a teſt of the former; but they will in general pay more attention to it likewiſe.

When the city of Antioch was diſpoſed to receive the goſpel; and the apoſtle Barnabas was ſent from Jeruſalem to promote the good work, which was there carrying on, the people ſeem to have been particularly influenced by his holy life; "*for he was a good man,*" ſays the apoſto-

lical hiſtorian, "*and full of the Holy Ghoſt, and* "*of faith—and much people was added unto the* "*Lord.*"

On the other hand, the pureſt doctrine will loſe its effect, among the common people at leaſt, in proportion as they ſee their miniſter pay leſs attention to it himſelf. That apoſtolical apoſtrophe, *Thou that preacheſt to others, teacheſt thou not thyſelf?* will ever be the language of popular contempt.

There is another kind of contempt alſo, which every conſiſtent man would particularly wiſh to avoid—and that is, his own contempt of himſelf. What muſt that man's feelings be, whoſe life is ſpent in a continued variance with thoſe truths, which he is *obliged to preach?* who muſt tell his hearers of governing their undue affections; and yet lets his own looſe in all the vanities of a diſſipated age? who muſt talk of the world as a pilgrimage; while every action of his life ſhews it to be his carnal home? who is obliged to preach the glories of a future ſtate, and the joys of heaven; while his own happineſs is plainly centered in worldly ambition, and worldly attentions?—Contempt abroad may be borne, if a man feel from the uprightneſs of his own heart,

that

that he does not deſerve it: but there is no refuge from contempt within—unleſs a man is paſt feeling, and ſets at defiance the remonſtrances even of common decency.

How far the miniſter of the goſpel ſhould keep at a diſtance from the world—from its ambitious views—its intereſts—and its party-contentions—*how far* he ſhould ſtand aloof from its pleaſures; and abſtain from many amuſements, which, though perhaps innocent in themſelves, may (at leaſt when countenanced by him) have a tendency to *break down the fences* of religion, are queſtions—not proper indeed for me to determine: but very proper for every churchman to examine ſeriouſly in his own conſcience. It is becoming ſurely that the miniſters of a religion, which ſo entirely diſclaims the world, ſhould endeavour at leaſt not to be much intangled in it. A moroſe character is not the alternative. Cheerfulneſs is the natural companion of religion. Sourneſs is an alien intruder. Amuſements too are neceſſary: but I am not ſingular in thinking thoſe amuſements ſhould rather be of the retired kind; than ſought for amidſt the noiſe and buſtle of the world. Riot and exceſs generally attend the amuſements

ments of a number of people aſſembled with a purpoſe of being joyous; and what none would do alone, is not ſcrupled perhaps, where the *impropriety* (which, by the way, deſerves often a ſeverer name) is divided among a multitude. In ſcenes like theſe, the clerical *habit* is a blot: the clerical *character*, a greater. There is nothing in uniformity with them. I would not be thought harſh: I would not be thought uncomplying. The world, I know, is often ſhocked at hearing the precepts of the goſpel oppoſed, in all their plainneſs, to the elegant faſhions, which it adopts: and we are ſometimes almoſt afraid, in our popular diſcourſes, of opening goſpel-truths ſo fully as we might; leſt by ſaying more than the times will bear, we ſhould injure a cauſe, which we wiſh to advance. Our bleſſed Lord himſelf was often obliged to ſpeak in parables. But let the *world*, if it pleaſe, be the *deaf adder, which ſtoppeth its ears*, there need be no apology ſurely for recommending goſpel-truths in the plaineſt manner to the *miniſters of the goſpel.*

But the clerical character may be a check upon improprieties.

I ſhould

I ſhould fear, not much. As we have the example however of our bleſſed Lord, who kept company with publicans and ſinners, with a view to reform them; nothing farther can be ſaid, if this be the *real motive*: though to me it appears riſking more, than the probability of advantage will inſure.

After all, my brethren, it may be an eaſy matter, in an age of licence, to *ſatisfy* ourſelves —if we make the *compariſon only with others*: but I hope this is a kind of *ſatisfaction*, and a kind of *compariſon*, in which none of us would willingly acquieſce. We talk of ſectaries, and novel teachers; and cry, *the people have itching ears*. Would to God, no blame in this matter may reſt upon ourſelves! To ſpeak with truth and candour, there does not ſeem, in general, to be ſo much ſimplicity, and propriety of manners amongſt *us*, as there appears to be amongſt ſeveral of our *diſſenting brethren*.

But propriety of manners is the diſſenter's chief ſupport. It is his worldly engine: and therefore his *motives* may be as worldly as ours.

They may, or may not, for any thing we know. We have nothing to do with any motives but our own. It concerns us more to conſider,

conſider, whether certain truths lie not nearer home? Whether the eſtabliſhed churchman declines the *heat of the day*, becauſe his wages are double? Whether he ſpend his ſuperfluity on the vanities of life, becauſe thoſe wages are abundant? or, whether his manners are more lax, becauſe thoſe wages are more certain?—*The harveſt truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few*, was a complaint of great authority in early days—things are not mended, I ſhould ſuppoſe, now. It is inconceivable how wrong the ſpiritual affairs of a pariſh get in a little time. Habits of vice, and inattention to every thing ſerious, make a quick progreſs. A few careleſs paſtors, ſucceeding each other, leave a pariſh in a ſtate of heatheniſm; and it muſt be a work of time, and labour—of length of time, of accumulated labour, to recover it from its ſupineneſs. A generation may be loſt; and no hope left but in a riſing one—whereas, if the care of one miniſter ſucceeded to that of another, each uniting ſimplicity of doctrine with ſimplicity of manners, in a few years a great change might be wrought.

Thus, my brethren, I have given you my thoughts on a ſubject—not very recondite indeed;

deed; but very intereſting. It is a ſerious buſineſs—a buſineſs too, in which we have all voluntarily engaged. We have all *put our hands to the plough*—and we know the conſequence of *looking back*. Let us then cheerfully proceed; evermore uniting our prayers with our endeavours, that God would, of his infinite mercy, grant, we may *both by our* PREACHING, and LIVING, SET FORTH *his holy word, and* SHEW *it accordingly*.

SERMON III.

MAT. iv. 1.

THEN WAS JESUS LED UP OF THE SPIRIT INTO THE WILDERNESS, TO BE TEMPTED OF THE DEVIL.

THE account we have of this tranſaction hath been thought by many an allegory, or ſacred fable: though I ſee not for what reaſon. It is introduced as a plain fact in a plain hiſtory, without any intimation that it is otherwiſe. It is connected alſo, as a real fact, with many parts of this hiſtory *. It carries the connection ſtill farther; and very naturally unites the Old Teſtament with the New. The former ſhews us, how the devil foiled the firſt Adam—the latter, how

* See 2 Cor. xi. 3.—1 Tim. ii. 14.—Theſſ. iii. 9.—Heb. iv. 15.—Heb. ii. 18.—Rev. xii. 9.—Rev. xx. 2, &c.

himſelf

himſelf was foiled by the ſecond. The ſubſtance of this relation is to the following effect:

After our bleſſed Saviour had ſuſtained a long faſt in the wilderneſs, the devil was permitted to tempt him; and firſt makes an application to the neceſſities of nature: *If thou be the ſon of God, command theſe ſtones to be made bread.* Jeſus gave him an anſwer, implying, that bread was not ſo neceſſary to man, as the ſpiritual food of religion, and truth. On this anſwer, the devil forms his ſecond temptation: If thou thus truſteſt in the mercies of God, let us ſee what the power of God will do for thee: throw thyſelf down from this height *, and try whether that God, in whom thou truſteſt, will ſuſtain thee from harm. Jeſus anſwered him by a paſſage from Moſes: *Thou ſhalt not tempt the Lord thy God:*— thou ſhalt not try any unneceſſary experiments of God's power to preſerve us; it is enough to truſt God in all the unavoidable difficulties of life.

The devil being thus foiled in theſe two temptations, makes his next attempt upon the

* It is rather probable, that the devil, who is ſtyled *prince of the air*, ſhould form an *appearance like the temple*, than that he ſhould carry Jeſus to Jeruſalem.

paſſions

paſſions of our bleſſed Saviour; and endeavours to find out, whether there is any ſecret inclination in him to ambition, covetouſneſs, vanity, or pleaſure; which he well knew was fatal ground to the ſons of men. Look round, ſaid he, from this lofty ſtand; ſee all the kingdoms of the earth ſpread before thee—all their wealth—all their glory, and all their pleaſures: all is mine; and ſhall be thine, if thou wilt give up thy allegiance to God, and put thy truſt in me *.—This was more than the bleſſed Jeſus could bear. He rebuked the devil with authority, and ſent him away: on which we read, that good angels came and miniſtered unto him.

There is no doubt but this, and all other parts of ſcripture, are recorded for our improvement: nor can we ſuppoſe the devil was permitted to aſſault our bleſſed Saviour, but for wiſe ends; and particularly for our inſtruction. Let us then ſee what inſtruction it affords.

In the firſt place, one great deſign of our bleſſed Saviour's having been tempted, was, we

* It is probable, that this view of all the kingdoms and glory of the world was, like the former, only a *viſionary ſcene*, produced for the purpoſe. The expreſſion, *in a moment of time*, ſeems to imply this—one ſcene following another.

may ſuppoſe, to encourage all good chriſtians to withſtand bravely thoſe temptations, with which their Lord had been aſſaulted before. If we ſay, that Chriſt's reſiſting temptation is no encouragement to us, becauſe his nature was divine, we do not conſider the caſe. It is true, if man was left entirely to himſelf, he could *not* be able to reſiſt the temptations of ſin. And in this caſe, undoubtedly, Chriſt's reſiſting temptation, would be no encouragement to him. But we know this is not the caſe—we know, that it is every where the doctrine of ſcripture, that we are *not* left to ourſelves; but that our ſincere endeavours will be aſſiſted by the Holy Spirit of God. And when we are aſſured that our bleſſed Lord *was tempted like as we are*, we cannot but have encouragement to hope, that he will kindly aſſiſt us in the ſame circumſtances; eſpecially when we endeavour to ſupport thoſe temptations for his ſake. Our reaſon—our natural feelings, encourage us to hope, that he will thus aſſiſt us. But theſe hopes become certainty, when we read in the word of God, that *Chriſt having been tempted, is able to ſuccour thoſe who are tempted.*

Another great uſe of our Saviour's temptation is, to convince us that we muſt all expect

to meet our trials, in ſome ſhape. No man, even of the moſt exalted goodneſs, can hope to live free from temptations: they meet us in every part of our paſſage through this world. In the cottage—in the palace—in company—in ſolitude; ſtill temptation, in ſome form, is ready to meet us. Temptations, we know, are God's means, in this world, to try and prove our religion. If there were no temptations, there could be no goodneſs. Our good works conſiſt chiefly in conquering the world, the fleſh, and the devil. We muſt conſider our temptations therefore in this light; and manfully ſtrive againſt them, whatever they are; nay, the apoſtle James bids us *count it all joy when we fall into divers temptations:* but that is, on a ſuppoſition we overcome them; becauſe, as he goes on to tell us, theſe are trials of our faith, which, like gold that is purified in the fire, comes out more pure. For what reaſon, think you, are we ſo frequently told, that the life of a chriſtian is like the life of a ſoldier? We are ordered to *fight the good fight*—to *put on the armour of God*—to *wreſtle againſt principalities and powers:* for what, but to give us fair warning of the dangers we are to expect? Frequent action, conſtant danger,

alarms, and watchings, make up the life of a ſoldier on duty: he can never be in a ſtate of repoſe, becauſe he cannot tell on what ſide his enemies may attack him: it is experience in all theſe things that makes the ſoldier: the beſt diſcipline will be incomplete without it: it is practice that confirms his valour—that acquires him preſence of mind—that makes him familiar with danger, and prevents his being overpowered by it. Juſt ſuch is the ſpiritual ſoldier in Chriſt: till he hath been brought into the field againſt his enemies—till he hath faced temptation, and boldly combated the world, the fleſh, and the devil, he would be unfit for ſervice; he would be unexperienced: having never been tried, he could not be depended on; nor expect thoſe glorious rewards, which God hath promiſed to his faithful ſoldiers in Chriſt.

Again, we may learn from our bleſſed Saviour's temptation, the nature of temptation in general. When the Tempter attacked our Lord, we find he did it under the pleas of reaſon, and religion; nay, he even quoted ſcripture to ſupport his deluſions: *Caſt thyſelf down; for it is written, he ſhall give his angels charge over thee, and in their hands they ſhall bear thee up, leſt at*

any time thou daſh thy foot againſt a ſtone. It is impoſſible to deſcribe the various arts, under which temptations aſſault us. The young and the old have their particular temptations; the rich and the poor. Our different tempers, our paſſions, and appetites, are all ſurrounded with different temptations ſuited to them: nay, our very reaſon often takes a part in deceiving us; our conſciences often loſe their feeling; nay, the temptation ſometimes comes clothed, like the devil's temptation of our Saviour, in falſe gloſſes upon the word of God itſelf. So ready are our paſſions, and appetites, to take ſhelter under authority;—ſo ready are we at endeavouring to reconcile our duty, and our darling ſins, and dividing ourſelves between God and Mammon.

Theſe remarks do not affect the profligate, abandoned ſinner; he ſins without any thought, but to obtain the object he deſires: they are directed to the lukewarm chriſtian, who never ſins without endeavouring to find ſome excuſe for his ſin—ſome reaſon, or ſome piece of ſcripture, which may leſſen the offence at leaſt, if not remove it.

Again, we may learn from our bleſſed Saviour's temptation, the method in which we ought

ought to repel temptations. Our Saviour, we obſerve, to every temptation replied in the words of ſcripture. When the Tempter ſaid, *If thou be the Son of God, command theſe ſtones to be made bread:* Jeſus replied from ſcripture, *Man ſhall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.* Again, when the Tempter ſaid, *If thou be the Son of God, caſt thyſelf down:* Jeſus again replied from ſcripture, *Thou ſhalt not tempt the Lord thy God.* And to the laſt temptation he replied in the ſame manner: *Thou ſhalt worſhip the Lord thy God, and him only ſhalt thou ſerve.*—What then are we to learn from this, but to oppoſe the authority of God to the wicked ſuggeſtions of the devil? St. Paul calls the ſcripture *the ſword of the Spirit;* intimating, with it we are to fight all our ſpiritual battles.—In the word of God, we find ſuch full and plain directions to keep us ſteady in our duty, that if we would attend to them, we ſhould be a match for all the wiles of temptation. The Tempter might diſplay all the *kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them:* we may anſwer, *We have a treaſure in heaven, a far more eternal weight of glory reſerved for us.* Is our faith aſſaulted by the ſpecious arguments of unbe-

lievers?—are we tempted to deny the Lord, who bought us with a price?—let us recollect that awful ſentence, *Whoſoever ſhall deny me before men, him will I alſo deny before my Father which is in heaven.* Are we tempted into the paths of forbidden pleaſure?—*What, know ye not that your bodies are the members of Chriſt? Know ye not that your bodies are the temples of the Holy Ghoſt? If any man defile the temple of God, him ſhall God deſtroy.* Are we tempted to do an act of injuſtice—to ſteal—to pilfer—to wrong one another in any ſhape; what ſays the word of God? *Let no man defraud his brother in any matter, for the Lord is the avenger of all ſuch.* Are we, in the ſecrecy of night, removed from the eye of man, or in the deep receſſes of our own thoughts, tempted to do, or meditate ſome wicked action;—are we then in private? Is there not a God, who *is about our path—about our bed, and ſpieth out all our ways?* A God, *with whom the night is as clear as the day?*—Laſtly, are we tempted through the oppreſſion of bad men, or the frowns of the world, in any ſhape to tranſgreſs our duty?—let us conſider, that all the ſufferings of this preſent time, the buffets of the world, and the threatenings of man,

man, are not to be feared in compariſon of Him *who can caſt both ſoul and body into hell.*—— Thus, I ſay, we may oppoſe every temptation by *the ſword of the Spirit.* The ſcripture furniſhes us with threatenings, with promiſes, with rules, and precepts ſufficient, on every occaſion that can ariſe: hence therefore we may conceive of what great uſe it is, for all ſorts of people to be converſant in ſcripture—to read it—to ſtudy it, eſpecially the practical parts of it; and lay it up in their memory. And this can be no difficulty to thoſe who have a deſire to learn. Every man has time enough to read his Bible, and lay up in his memory a ſtock of ſuch knowledge as may be thus drawn out on every occaſion, and preſerve him in the hour of temptation. Without this ſword of the Spirit, we fight unarmed, and there is no wonder if we are overcome: but when thus accoutred, we are always under arms; we are always upon guard; and may prevent a thouſand ſurprizes, and withſtand a thouſand aſſaults, which may overcome thoſe who are *not* thus provided.— When a temptation ariſes, ſome apt piece of ſcripture will always ariſe with it; and one ſhould hope, the word of God would always become

ſuperior. This is imitating our bleſſed Saviour in a point of the utmoſt conſequence; and repelling temptation, in a manner in which he hath taught us.

Let us now, in the laſt place, learn from our Lord's temptation, the comforts which ariſe from overcoming temptation: *Then the devil leaveth him; and behold angels came and miniſtered unto him.* Whatever difficulty there may be in oppoſing temptation, when it *is* oppoſed, and overcome, it is certainly the ſource of great happineſs. There is ſomething agreeable to the human mind in making a ſucceſsful ſtruggle in any thing—in getting the better of any difficulty; and the greater and more excellent the thing is, the greater the ſatisfaction which ariſes from the conqueſt. Getting the better, therefore, of the temptations which aſſault our virtue, muſt of all things be the moſt happy, becauſe it is of all others the greateſt conqueſt: we feel the comfort of it in our hearts, the neareſt of any thing we can conceive, to *good angels miniſtering unto us.* For ought we know, this comfort may ariſe from *good angels miniſtering unto us.* It is, in fact, what the ſcriptures call, "the joy and comfort of the Holy Spirit of God abiding in us."

But

But deſcription is needleſs: it is to be *felt*, not *deſcribed*. They who have felt it, need no deſcription to make it more known; and they who have not felt it, will not be at all the wiſer, I fear, from any deſcription of it that can be given.

THUS I have endeavoured to explain to you the uſes that may be made of our bleſſed Lord's temptation. It remains for others to ſhew what uſes it had, if it had not been *real*. I know of none. Where is the example, where is the conſolation, in a mere viſion? It authenticates nothing: it may be a pleaſing narrative; but it wants authority, either to compel example, or to furniſh comfort. In this therefore, as in all other things, we ſhould follow the ſteps of our bleſſed Lord, who came to teach us the way to ſalvation. As he was, ſo may we be, aſſiſted by the divine grace. We may ſay, as he did, to every temptation, as it ariſes, *Get thee hence, Satan: God's grace is ſufficient for us, and his ſtrength is made perfect in our weakneſs.* The devil can only ſuggeſt temptations. He who tempts cannot compel. There can be no ſin without our own conſent. There is no harm

in

in the temptation: there is no harm done till the temptation prevails. It is the devil's act to tempt; and ours to yield. We may yield, or we may reſiſt:—to yield, is ſin; to reſiſt, is religion. Temptations furniſh opportunities for both. Danger indeed there is; and this ſhould awaken all our care and caution; and the more ſo, as we know our care and caution may be effectual; and that if we ourſelves do our beſt, *God's grace will not ſuffer us to be tempted above what we are able; but will with the temptation make a way to eſcape, that we may be able to bear it.*

SERMON IV.

I PET. ii. 21.

LEAVING US AN EXAMPLE, THAT WE SHOULD FOLLOW HIS STEPS.

IT is one of the great advantages of the chriſtian religion, that it is enforced upon us, not only by the precepts, but by the example of its bleſſed Author. This is an advantage peculiar to chriſtianity: the Jewiſh religion could not boaſt it: Moſes was a great leader, and a great lawgiver; but his example did not deſcend, like that of Jeſus, into common life. It is true, indeed, that our Saviour's example is a mark, we can at beſt only aim at; yet ſtill there is ſomething encouraging in ſeeing the rules, that are to guide our lives, illuſtrated by the *actions of a life:* they ſeem to come nearer our attainment: at leaſt they ſhew us, how amiably they

they ſit upon a human being; and in how reſpectable a light even a mortal man might appear, if he could get the better of his bad paſſions and appetites, his follies and prejudices, and govern his actions more by the example of his bleſſed Saviour.—The example of Chriſt, therefore, I propoſe as the ſubject of the following diſcourſe; and ſhall, *firſt*, point it out to you as a perfect pattern; and, *ſecondly*, ſhew you how far we may follow it.

The example of any *human being* might often miſlead us. Where ſhall we find, among the children of men, the pattern of a life, not only unblemiſhed by weakneſſes, but untainted by ſin? It is true, many parts of an amiable character may undoubtedly be worthy of our imitation; but ſtill, without care, even theſe very virtues may miſlead us. If, as is often the caſe, through our admiration of a few ſhining parts in a character, we are led through prejudice to admire the whole, we may eaſily be deceived: we may imitate weakneſſes, prejudices, humours, and follies; we may adopt many wrong ſentiments, from which no human being is free: nothing is more common than this ſort of imitation and deception. A man, for inſtance, is kind

kind and friendly; and his kindneſs and friendlineſs are worthy of our imitation: but perhaps he may ſit looſe to the ties of religion; he may be lax in his practice, or uncharitable in his party-diſtinctions. Now, if through our admiration of the amiable parts of his character, we imitate thoſe which are faulty, (and, by giving his faults ſome gentle name, this may eaſily happen through friendſhip,) we are miſled, you ſee, even by virtue itſelf. In following the examples, therefore, of our fellow-creatures, even the beſt of them, it requires caution. Diſtinctions muſt be made: we muſt ſeparate the good from the bad; and we muſt neceſſarily have another rule to go by, than the fallible example we follow; that is, we muſt have a rule, by which the example itſelf muſt be judged.—But the example of Chriſt is as much a pattern, as his precepts are a rule. Here we cannot err. We have only to imitate as cloſely as poſſible; and the more cloſely we imitate, the better. It was the obſervation of an old philoſopher in the heathen world, that if virtue could appear to mankind in a viſible ſhape, cloathed in all that majeſty and ſweetneſs which naturally belong to it, the heavenly form would captivate the eyes of men,

and

and inſpire them with the love of goodneſs. This heavenly appearance is really in a manner placed before us chriſtians. In the example of our bleſſed Saviour, virtue *is* placed before us in a viſible ſhape: we not only hear it dictating, in the form of rules and inſtructions; but we ſee it acting before us, in all the offices of life.—Nor can we pretend to ſay, that we have, in the example of our bleſſed Saviour, ſuch a pattern as we cannot follow. It is true, we cannot come up to it, nor imitate it in every part; but it is in general plain to our capacities. Had the example of our Saviour been the example of a perſon in an elevated ſtation of life—had our Lord ſhewn us how kings ought to reign, or magiſtrates to govern, or generals to command, it would have been a noble leſſon, no doubt, for kings, and magiſtrates, and generals; but it could have been imitated only by few. Or, had our Lord given us the example of auſtere manners—of a life devoted entirely to religious offices, the neceſſary buſineſs of the world would not have permitted us to imitate it. But it is an example of a different kind which our bleſſed Lord has ſet before us: it is the example of meekneſs, gentleneſs, contentment, kindneſs, affection,

affection, heavenly-mindedneſs, humility; a life ſpent in being of ſervice to others; of piety and devotion; and of mild ſubmiſſion, and reſignation, in all caſes, to the will of God. This example, as far as the divine nature of our Saviour was concerned, was certainly unneceſſary; but he choſe to give us the example in the human nature, as ſuited to the imitation of mankind. High and low, rich and poor, this countryman and that countryman, people of all profeſſions, of all ages, and of all diſtinctions, find here an example ſuited to their imitation—the example of a holy, good man, which people of all profeſſions ought to follow.

If there are any, to whom Chriſt's example is more peculiarly adapted, it is thoſe in low circumſtances. He often tells us, he was the preacher of the goſpel which was meant for the poor. And his example has the ſame tendency. He does not ſet the example of ſpending a fortune in a noble and magnificent manner—of doing great and generous things; but of ſuch virtues as may be practiſed in the humbleſt life. None of *you* can have *leſs* of the world's goods than your Saviour had; but he was content to bear all the evils of the loweſt ſtation, that he might

might ſet you an example of truſting in God in all your diſtreſſes; and of thus making poverty the means of religion.

Having thus pointed out to you the example of our bleſſed Lord as a perfect pattern, I ſhall now ſhew you how far you may follow it:—*He left us an example, that we ſhould follow his ſteps.* To follow the ſteps of a perſon, ſignifies, that we ſhould go the ſame road—that we ſhould turn neither to the right hand, nor to the left; but, as nearly as may be, purſue the track of the perſon we follow.—Now, in ſome things it is impoſſible for us to follow the ſteps of Chriſt: as, in the firſt place, where he acts in his prophetic character—when he denounces woe againſt the ſcribes and phariſees; or when he denounces judgment upon the unrighteous cities, which ſhut their ears againſt the truth; or when he drove the buyers and ſellers out of the temple.—Other parts of his life, too, are beyond our example. In one part of ſcripture we are told, he faſted forty days and forty nights; in another, that he would continue whole nights and days in prayers to God. Now theſe ſteps, we know, it is as impoſſible for us to follow, as it is to work the miracles which Chriſt

Chriſt wrought; yet ſtill, even theſe we ought to follow at a proper diſtance. If we do not denounce judgments againſt wicked men, we ſhould at leaſt diſcourage and avoid them: if we cannot, with the zeal and dignity of our Lord, drive the buyers and ſellers out of the temple, we can, however, ſhew our regard to the temple of God, by continually frequenting it, and with ſincerity performing our devotions in it: if we cannot faſt forty days and forty nights, yet ſtill we can practiſe ſuch ſelf-denial, ſuch ſobriety, and ſuch temperance, as our nature will allow, and our religion preſcribes: if the frailty and circumſtances of our nature will not ſuffer us to continue all night in prayer to God, yet ſtill we can perform our devotions, both in public and private, with attention, ſincerity, and fervour.—Theſe, however, are the extraordinary parts of that great example, whoſe ſteps we are to follow in general, it is obvious, to imitation. The common parts of our Saviour's life ſet before us the plain example of doing our duty to God, our neighbour, and ourſelves; and the manner in which we are to follow the example, is to go as far in the imitation of it as we can. When the text ſays, *Be ye perfect, as your heavenly*

Father is perfect, the meaning is not that, by the beſt of our endeavours we can attain that perfection; but by imitating that example, as far as we can, we may go higher than we could without it. And hence ariſes the great advantage of having a perfect pattern. We may ſtill riſe higher in the degrees of imitation; as there will always be ſo many degrees above us, that we can never attain the higheſt.

And now, my brethren, let us (as we ought on all occaſions to apply every inſtruction to practice) ſeriouſly aſk ourſelves, whether we do in earneſt ſet the bleſſed example of this holy life before our eyes? Whether, as far as we can, we follow thoſe heavenly ſteps that went before us?—How are your hearts with regard to God? Do you feel any thing like that piety to God, that zeal for his laws, that love of God, that confidence, that truſt in him, which appeared in your bleſſed Lord? or are your hearts always grovelling in the world, and ſtuck faſt in the mire of earthly things? Are you not often ſo far from reverencing the name of God, that many of you ſcruple not to prophane it with oaths and imprecations? If called to ſome ſevere trial; if any misfortune is laid upon you;

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if you are reduced to a ſtate of indigence, or confined to the bed of ſickneſs, can you look up to heaven, lay your hands upon your breaſts, and ſay, with the bleſſed Jeſus, *Thy will be done?* or, do you *kick againſt the pricks*, and, full of repining, murmur at that gracious God, who intends your good in all his diſpenſations?—Again, How are you with your neighbour? Do you follow the bright example, in behaving with mildneſs, and ſweetneſs of manners, to all with whom you converſe, in your families at home particularly? or are you provoking, inſolent, moroſe, ſullen, and overbearing? Are you prepared to forgive every injury that is done you, like the bleſſed Jeſus, who, in the midſt of the moſt bitter ſufferings, cried, *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do?* or, are you ready to take offence at every trifle, and turn every ſlight occaſion into matter of quarrel? Are you, like the mild Saviour of mankind, full of tenderneſs, compaſſion, and charity; and ready to do good to all who need your aſſiſtance? or, are you ſo far from doing them good, that you are more diſpoſed to cheat and injure them, if you can ſerve your own advantage by doing it privately?—Again, how do you prac-

tiſe your duty to yourſelves? No impurity ever ſtained that holy life; and are your lives ſenſual, given up to low pleaſures, debauchery, and drunkenneſs? How ſits the world upon you? Can you ſay, that *in whatſoever ſtate you are, you have learned to be content?* Can you ſay with your bleſſed Maſter, calm and reſigned, *the foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have neſts; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head?* or, do you feel your breaſts full of anxiety and diſcontent, of repining and diſtreſs —perhaps, full of envy, becauſe your neighbours have more of this world's good than has fallen to you?

Do not then, my brethren, deceive yourſelves; nor ſuppoſe, that this bright example—the hiſtory of our bleſſed Lord, which employed the pens of four evangeliſts, and was dictated by the holy Spirit of God, was given you as an ordinary tale: it was given you to direct your lives—to aſſiſt the precepts of the goſpel, and make the ſtrongeſt impreſſion upon you. People may ſay, they cannot underſtand this text of ſcripture, or the other; and, no doubt, there are many texts of ſcripture which are not eaſily underſtood; but a holy life is a leſſon which every body may read,

read, and every body may underſtand: and for this reaſon, no doubt, among others, the ſcheme of our religion was given us in the form of a hiſtory, to make our duty more plain and eaſy. *Evil communication*, ſays the text, *corrupts good manners;* juſt ſo, good communication has a tendency to improve them. We employ many a leiſure hour, even the moſt induſtrious of us, in things that are of little value; let us, now and then at leaſt, employ one in reading the holy ſcriptures; and in forming our manners after the example of the bleſſed Jeſus: let us endeavour—in *our hearts* let us endeavour, to accompany him, as he goes from place to place, intent on nothing but on works of charity, and kindneſs, and piety: let us liſten to his divine diſcourſes; and, above all, let us ſtudy his bright example. Living with a holy perſon affords often the beſt kind of inſtruction: let us live with Chriſt; let us learn from him patience, and temperance, and humility, and reſignation; let us, in few words, learn to amend our hearts, and deſpiſe the world: then ſhall we be heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Chriſt. But if we reject this adoption, and let the world, and all its wickedneſs have our hearts, then, inſtead of

being the diſciples and imitators of Chriſt, we become the children, as our Saviour tells the impenitent Jews, *of our father, the devil. I am the vine*, ſays Chriſt to his true followers, *and ye are the branches:* ye receive your nouriſhment from the vine; and through your connection with it, bear fruit, and bring it to perfection. But if you break off all connection with the vine, you ſhall be pruned away, and thrown aſide, like withered ſticks appointed for the fire.

SERMON V.

MAT. vi. 34.

TAKE NO THOUGHT FOR THE MORROW: FOR THE MORROW WILL TAKE THOUGHT FOR THE THINGS OF ITSELF, SUFFICIENT UNTO THE DAY IS THE EVIL THEREOF.

THE enemies of chriſtianity have ſometimes ridiculed reſtrictions of this kind; as if the goſpel was calculated only to qualify men for the next world, while it leaves them totally negligent of this. Though they live in the world, and are cloſely connected with it by various ties moral and natural, they are to paſs through it, as if they had neither relation to *it*, nor it to *them*: they are to *take no thought about it*.

But whatever might have been objected on this head to the chriſtians of old times, the chriſtians of theſe days ſeem to have wiped off

at leaſt *this* ſlander perfectly well. It cannot now be ſaid, we are ſo dead to this world as to have no concern in any of its affairs. We hold now a different language: we are now inclined to ſuppoſe the precepts of the goſpel ſomewhat too ſtrict, and wiſh to give them a greater latitude. It is impoſſible, we cry, not to take thought both for to-day and to-morrow; the buſineſs of the world requires us to take thought. Accordingly we give our own interpretation to the phraſe; and this interpretation often comprehends every thing that ambition, or pleaſure, or avarice, can deſire.

No doubt the queſtion is rather nice. It is difficult to ſay, how far *taking thought* for to-day and to-morrow, ſhould be allowed or reſtrained. Yet after all, it is a queſtion rather nice in reaſoning than in practice. If a man follow his conſcience, directed by the *general* rules of ſcripture, he cannot greatly err. It is impoſſible the ſcripture can make rules for every man's particular caſe: it gives us here therefore, as on other occaſions, one *general rule;* and God hath given us reaſon, and conſcience to teach us *how to apply it.* Thus a man, for inſtance, who has ſeveral children to provide for, has more reaſon

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to *take thought* than he who has none: and ſo in other caſes. In ſhort, all thought that is neceſſary is permitted; all thought which anſwers no real end, but leads only to miſchief, is forbidden: and there is no mode of determination left, but through an *honeſt, informed* conſcience.

Having made theſe *general obſervations*, let us now conſider the precept more cloſely; and examine, *firſt*, what kind of people it cenſures; and, *ſecondly*, what advice it gives them.

It cenſures, we find, two kinds of people;—not only thoſe who make an *unreaſonable proviſion for future good*, but thoſe alſo who are under *unreaſonable apprehenſions of future evil.*

In the firſt place, it cenſures thoſe who make an *unreaſonable proviſion for future good*—who extend their deſires beyond proper bounds.

That we may make ſome proviſion for the future, is undoubted. The fruits of ſummer muſt be laid up for winter. A *prudent* care for to-morrow is certainly therefore allowed: but the miſchief is, we are ſeldom inclined to conſider what is a *prudent care*—how far we may advance, or where we ought to ſtop. When this is the caſe—when we do not conſult our reaſon and

and conſcience, informed by the general rules of ſcripture, we may go any length: we have forſaken ſuch principles and ſuch rules as ſhould lead us right—we are under the guidance of wild, avaricious deſires, that have no bounds—we are laying up for vanity, for miſchief: the world has taken poſſeſſion of us—there is an end of piety, gratitude, and every religious ſentiment, if we ever had any—and it is well if we can keep within the bounds of moral honeſty.—Long, however, before we proceed this length, we have the power to call ourſelves to account by the application of ſcripture-rules; and though in caſes of this kind, in which the world draws us ſo powerfully aſide, the beſt may in ſome degree err, yet an honeſt conſcience will be a conſtant check, and prevent, we may humbly hope, our worldly views from gaining much upon us.

Perhaps ſome ſuch queſtions as theſe (if an honeſt conſcience be permitted to anſwer them freely) would check the violent purſuits of avarice:—Can you reaſonably ſuppoſe you will yourſelf ever have occaſion for all this hoarded ſtore? If not, is there any reaſon to ſuppoſe a ſuperabundant proviſion can be uſeful to your children,

children, or other dependents?—If this proviſion exceed what is neceſſary to put them forward in the world, it will probably lead to miſchief. To their ſtation in life, no doubt, ſome conſideration is neceſſary; but, in general, thoſe are the happieſt people who have only the means given them of exerciſing their own induſtry and ingenuity: they who have ſuch ſuperabundance thrown upon them at once as exceeds all their wants, indulge commonly in various modes of vicious diſſipation.

Would you ſee a worldly temper exemplified in the ſtrongeſt point of light, read the ſtory in the goſpel of the rich man, who pulled down his barns to build greater. His grounds *brought forth plentifully;* and if from that plenty he had made a moderate proviſion for himſelf and his family, and given the reſt among his poor neighbours, he had never been hung out as an unworthy example in a parable. But here he erred. The more he abounded, the more his deſires increaſed: when his grounds brought forth the *moſt plentifully*, then it was that he began to think a *ſtill more* plentiful proviſion neceſſary—then it was that he began to pull down his barns, and to build greater; and when he had

had beſtowed all his goods in them, and ſaw all his ſtores collected before his eyes, his heart rejoiced within him: he forgot all dependence upon God, and depended entirely upon the riches in his barns: *Soul*, ſaid he, *thou haſt much goods laid up for many years: thou haſt nothing now to fear; eat, drink, and be merry.* Alas! he had only one night to live!—But though God may not always call the hoarders of this world to ſo ſhort an account, yet it is prudent in them to live under an idea of the poſſibility of ſuch an event. An avaricious heart, depend upon it, is a bad preparation for the next world.

The rational inquiries, ſuggeſted above, which the hoarders of this world are required to make, ſeem all to be comprehended in the queſtion, which God is introduced aſking the rich man, in the parable, *Whoſe ſhall thoſe things be which thou haſt provided?* What advantage will it be, either to thyſelf or others, to make ſuch a ſuper-abundant proviſion?—We can ſay nothing farther to the hoarders of this world: if they refuſe to govern themſelves by ſuch inquiries, we muſt leave them to take their chance with him who *pulled down his barns to build greater.*

BUT I told you there is another ſort of people who come under the cenſure of *taking thought for to-morrow*—thoſe who are continually diſtreſſing themſelves by their fears of future evil. They are always looking forward with a foreboding eye, and ſeeing miſchief at a diſtance: they can magnify every thing into a diſtreſs: if they ſee a cloud riſing, *no bigger than a man's hand*, their imagination preſently *overſpreads the heavens with wind and tempeſt*. This is indeed a juſt picture of them: for they are often a religious ſort of people—much more ſo than the others; and perhaps bear the great afflictions of life with fortitude. When the ſtorm really comes on, they can meet it with reſolution: it is the diſtant gathering only—the *little riſing cloud, no bigger than a man's hand*, which they dread.

But whatever be their religious ſentiments on other ſubjects, on this they certainly indulge a frame of mind, which cannot well ſubſiſt with the firm belief of the wiſdom, the power, and goodneſs of God: for, as theſe corroding cares deſtroy our comforts and embitter our bleſſings, ſo do they interrupt our devotion, unſettle our better thoughts, check our reſignation, and abandon us to thoſe gloomy conceptions which

cut away faith and hope, the anchors of the ſoul. All religion aſſures us, that our affairs are infinitely better in the hands of God than in our own; and that they who are continually brooding over future evil, as far as theſe thoughts go, diſpoſſeſs God of the government of the world.

Now both theſe ſorts of men are cenſured, as *taking thought for the morrow*—thoſe who make an unreaſonable proviſion for future good, and thoſe who are under an unreaſonable fear of future evil. To theſe two kinds of people, therefore, the text addreſſes two different modes of inſtruction:—The former are told, that *the morrow will take care for the things of itſelf*; the latter are put in mind, that *ſufficient unto the day is the evil thereof*. Let us examine the weight of theſe two reaſons, which was the *ſecond* point I propoſed to conſider.

In the firſt place, they who are never ſatisfied with heaping up are told, that *the morrow will take care for the things of itſelf*. The expreſſion is much the ſame as that in the Lord's Prayer, *Give us, day by day, our daily bread*; and inſtructs us to depend on God. God's character, as our Father, is our ſecurity for our future

future ſubſiſtence; but then, like good children, we muſt not preſume to preſcribe to our parent. A good chriſtian may reaſonably hope, that God will give him a ſufficient proviſion of the things of this world: but in this dependence on God, he muſt not expect more than a *reaſonable proviſion*. We may truſt God for a ſupply of our *wants*; but God hath no where promiſed that we ſhall be clothed in *purple and fine linen*. Our own prudence, care, and induſtry, ſhould always accompany our dependence on God: but when theſe are properly exerted, we muſt totally leave the *events of to-morrow* to him; and may hope, that through his gracious providence *to-morrow will take care for the things of itſelf*. Even thoſe in the loweſt circumſtances may hope that ſome favourable event will take place to-morrow, if they ſhould feel any deficiency to-day. All events, which we foolihly call *chances*, are in the hands of God; and it is an eaſy matter for him to direct ſome of thoſe *chances* into the courſe of our affairs, ſo as to give them a more favourable turn. If to-morrow does not repair the deficiences of to-day, we may be aſſured there is ſome good reaſon for it, of which we ourſelves hereafter will probably ſee the propriety.—God's promiſes

promiſes have reference chiefly to the next world. If he give us ſufficient to carry us through this world, it is all he has promiſed: but the great misfortune is, that while God would carry our expectations to heaven, we are more inclined to keep them on earth.

Such is the advice given to thoſe who are too ſolicitous about future good. They who are too apprehenſive of future evil are told, that *ſufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.*

It is *ſufficient*, becauſe your care and anxiety cannot make things better. Yes, you ſay, your foreſight of evil prepares you to meet it. That is true, when the evil cannot be avoided; you may then make it more tolerable, by impreſſing your mind frequently with the thoughts of it. The more you live under the impreſſion of death, for inſtance, the better prepared you will be to meet it. But the advice in the text reſpects only ſuch evils as it is full as probable may never happen—ſuch evils as may be greater, or may be leſs, or may be the means of happineſs, or may be any thing different from what you apprehend. Your care and anxiety may adminiſter great diſtreſs, but certainly no real comfort.

Secondly,

Secondly, *ſufficient unto the day is the evil thereof;* becauſe, when the evil does arrive, you can adjuſt yourſelf to it better than when you only foreſee it. When it is fully before you, you examine it in all its circumſtances; and caſt about, how you may beſt—either oppoſe it, if you can; or, if you cannot, how you may bear it with reſignation: but till it arrive, you can do nothing effectually. No man will act upon conjecture when he may have certainty; and ſurely no wiſe man will endeavour to accommodate himſelf and his affairs to circumſtances, which may never arrive at all.

Thirdly, *ſufficient unto the day is the evil thereof;* becauſe God, in his good providence, hath ordered the afflictions of each portion of time in ſuch a way as to ſuit beſt with a ſtate of trial. He does not deſire you to croud more evil into the day than belongs to it: he does not require you to go out of your way to meet evil, and, as it were, to ſolicit it; but only religiouſly to bear it, and make a proper uſe of it, when he thinks proper to ſend it.

Laſtly, *ſufficient unto the day is the evil thereof;* becauſe we are in the hands of a gracious God, who will ſupport us *in the day* when the evil ar-

gives, however ſevere it may be: if we are his faithful ſervants (and if we are not, we have nothing to do with this kind of comfort) we ſhall find the means of bearing evil ariſe with the occaſion. We are aſſured, that *God careth for us; and that he knoweth what things we have need of before we aſk.* While we are therefore under his care, we ſhall find our ſtrength ſufficient for the evil of the day, whatever it may be.

Thus I have endeavoured to ſhew you, how much all thoſe are to blame who *take thought for to-morrow;* either in the way of *procuring more than they want,* or in the way of *dreading evils which may never happen.*

The great concluſion from the whole is, that inſtead of depending on ourſelves, we ſhould truſt our affairs in better hands, and depend on God. Worldly hopes, and worldly fears, are only various modes of diſappointment; but he who truſts in God has a ſure refuge.

Some people may ſay, they cannot help the intruſion of theſe anxious thoughts. In a degree, perhaps, they cannot. It is their natural temper—it is their infirmity; and the infirmities

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of our nature can never totally be ſubdued: but ſtill we ought to ſtrive againſt this infirmity, as we ſhould do againſt other infirmities; and when we do not, what was at firſt an infirmity, may in the end become guilt.

I ſhall conclude with that noble and affecting addreſs to the anxious world, with which our bleſſed Saviour cloſes his argument:

Therefore I ſay unto you, *Take no thought for your life, what ye ſhall eat, nor what ye ſhall drink; nor yet for the body, what ye ſhall put on: is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?* Is not that God who gave you being, able alſo to preſerve that being? Is not that God who gave you a body, able alſo to clothe that body? *Behold the fowls of the air: they ſow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns.* They are wholly diveſted of all future care, yet your heavenly Father feedeth *them;* and *are not you much better than they?* Will God take care of the fowls of the air, and not take care of you? *Conſider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they toil not, neither do they ſpin, and yet I ſay unto you, that even Solomon, in all his glory, was not arrayed like one of theſe.* And will God clothe ſo inferior a part of his creation as the

flowers of the field with ſuch ſplendour, and will he not provide you with the common neceſſaries of life?—Beſides, how fooliſh it is to indulge this anxious temper; which of you, *even by taking thought, can add one moment to his life* *?—which of you, with all his anxious care, can change a ſtate of trial into a ſtate of happineſs? Therefore take no thought, ſaying, *What ſhall we eat, or what ſhall we drink, or wherewithal ſhall we be clothed? for after all theſe things do the Gentiles ſeek*—the children of this world, who think of nothing elſe. *Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all theſe things. But ſeek ye firſt the kingdom of God, and his righteouſneſs, and all theſe things ſhall be added unto you.* Live in obedience to God's laws—in a dependence on him; be induſtrious and frugal, and the pooreſt of you need not fear a ſupply of theſe neceſſary things. *Take therefore no thought for the morrow; for the morrow will take thought for the things of itſelf; ſufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.*

* This is a better tranſlation of the original, than *one cubit to his ſtature*, which is indeed a great quantity.—See Parkhurſt's remarks, in his lexicon, on the two words Ηλικια and Πηχυς; the former of which ſometimes ſignifies *the duration of a man's life*—the latter, *a ſhort portion of time.*

SERMON VI.

1 COR. xiii. 1.

THOUGH I SPEAK WITH THE TONGUES OF MEN AND OF ANGELS, AND HAVE NOT CHARITY, I AM BECOME AS SOUNDING BRASS, OR A TINKLING CYMBAL.

IT muſt be a deficiency of ſome very eſſential grace, which can render the voice of angels an empty ſound: the apoſtle calls it *charity*; and that we may not miſtake his meaning, he has given us ſeveral marks by which we may diſtinguiſh it from every other chriſtian virtue.

By theſe marks, therefore, I ſhall examine, *firſt*, what the apoſtle means by charity; *ſecondly*, the excellence of it; and, *thirdly*, how far we are poſſeſſed of it.

I. *First*, then, let us find out what the apoſtle means by charity. If we had not been guarded againſt the miſtake, many might perhaps ſuppoſe he meant only giving alms; but one of his marks ſets it wide of this interpretation. We may *give all our goods*, he tells us, *to feed the poor*, and yet ſtill want charity. This indeed was of old the Phariſee's idea of charity: he boaſted that he *gave alms of every thing he poſſeſſed*; but at the ſame time, with all the inſolence of pride, he could thank God, that *he was not as other men were*.—There was nothing like charity here. This would not ſtand the teſt of the apoſtle's deſcription. Alms-giving may make a part of it, and always ſhould, where there is ability; yet charity may exiſt without that ability.——But let the apoſtle explain himſelf.

In the 4th, 5th, 6th, and 7th verſes of this chapter he does it fully. He removes it entirely from outward actions, (with which at preſent his diſcourſe is not concerned,) and carries it immediately to the heart, where it rules and enlivens all our affections.

In the firſt place, he tells us, the charitable man *ſuffereth long, and is kind*. He not only beareth the little ſlights and affronts of men, without

without the leaſt wiſh to reſent them, and even injuries, that do not materially affect him; but is even kind to the perſon from whom they proceed, *heaping coals of fire upon his head*; as it is called in another part of ſcripture, and melting down the hardneſs of his heart by acts of kindneſs.

The apoſtle informs us farther, that the charitable man *envieth not*: no man's advantages—no man's ſucceſs in life, give him that unchriſtian feeling, which we call envy. Envy has not even the excuſe of many other vices: it has no ſelfiſh end in view, for it hath no effect in bettering our condition; nor is it excited by any natural propenſity; but is a vile, gloomy wiſh, without any expectation of advantage, to bring down the virtues, the happineſs, or the ſucceſs of others, by calumny or malicious actions, to our own level. Every idea of this kind the charitable man deteſts. To harbour the thought a moment debaſes the mind.

And as the charitable man doth not envy the advantages of others, neither is he exalted with his own. Charity *vaunteth not itſelf; is not puffed up; doth not behave itſelf unſeemly*. The charitable man ſees things in their true light: he

rates the littleneſs of all earthly advantages as they deſerve: if he be favoured with them, he thanks heaven for them, and endeavours to make a right uſe of them; but never makes them matter of oſtentation. That unſeemly behaviour, which pride dictates, he abhors. Pride was not made for man. *Who maketh thee to differ from another?—what haſt thou, that thou didſt not receive?*—theſe expreſſions are engraven, in large letters, on the heart of the charitable man.

Charity, continues the apoſtle, *ſeeketh not her own.* The common interpretation of this expreſſion is, that the charitable man does not, in all circumſtances, inſiſt upon what he might even juſtly claim; eſpecially if there be any degree of hardſhip in the caſe: and this interpretation is both good and ſcriptural; but I am apprehenſive it is not exactly what the apoſtle meant. By comparing this paſſage with other paſſages, it is moſt likely that, by *ſeeking not his own*, the apoſtle meant, that the charitable man is not merely intent on ſeeking his own good, but ſeeks the good of others alſo: he is, at all times, as ready to make others happy as he is deſirous of being happy himſelf.

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The apoſtle proceeds. *Charity is not eaſily provoked; thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth.* This is a very amiable part of the charitable man's character: he is not eaſily provoked: he expects, in his paſſage through life, to meet with people who are quarrelſome, wrong-headed, unreaſonable, contradictious, and, in ſhort, often very provoking. For all this he is prepared; and is not eaſily provoked by the abſurdities or perverſeneſs of theſe untractable people: he conſiders them as ſuffering under the infirmities of human nature, and endeavours to ſteer his courſe among their ſeveral humours with what caution and forbearance he can: he does not ſuffer himſelf to dwell on their infirmities; but thinks as well of them as their ſeveral caſes will admit: he feels no pleaſure in the difficulties and miſchief they often draw upon themſelves by their folly and indiſcretion. The happineſs of his life never ariſes from the afflictions of others—his joys are all of a different kind: nothing but what in ſome ſhape has a tendency to promote the good of man, or the glory of God, is matter of joy to him;—cheerful he always is; but he *rejoiceth only in the truth.*

The apoſtle laſtly tells us, that *charity beareth all things; believeth all things; hopeth all things.* The charitable man *beareth all things*, or, as the words rather imply, he *covereth all things*. So far from being *provoked* by the infirmities of others, he hides and conceals them: he doubts the truth of many relations, of which he hears only one ſide; and when he has not juſt grounds to go upon, he always hopeth the beſt. One bad action, he thinks, does not determine a character; from a ſingle action therefore, unleſs very flagrant, he never takes his meaſure.

Theſe then are the marks which the apoſtle gives us, of what he calls charity; and from ſumming them together, we find he means not any *particular* duty, but a *general* diſpoſition of mind—a diſpoſition which inclines us to make every body happy, as far as we can; and to aſſiſt, comfort, pity, and relieve, wherever we have the power.

II. HAVING ſeen what charity is, let us, *ſecondly*, examine its excellence. Here, too, the apoſtle will be our guide. No virtue, grace, or accompliſhment, he tells us, can be of any value in the eye of God without it: *the tongues of men*

men and of angels—languages, learning, and the moſt perſuaſive kinds of eloquence, without charity, are unmeaning words. *The gift of prophecy, the underſtanding of myſteries, and all ſpiritual knowledge*, compared with charity, the apoſtle tells us, are nothing: nay, without this virtue, the great chriſtian grace of faith itſelf would be of no avail. *Though I had all faith*, ſays he, *that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.*

From extraordinary *gifts* the apoſtle proceeds to conſider extraordinary *actions*; which, however ſplendid, he informs us, are of no value, unleſs accompanied with charity. *Though I beſtow all my goods*, ſays he, *to feed the poor*, it profiteth me nothing. Giving my goods, indeed, to feed the poor, may profit them; but unleſs it be done on a charitable motive, it will never profit me. Accompanied with charity, it will profit both.

Religious ſeverities are as vain. Giving my *body to be burned*—martyrdom itſelf—laying down my life for religion—has nothing in it acceptable to God, if it be deſtitute of this great principle.

The apoſtle uſes another argument to ſhew the excellence of charity, drawn from its eternal

nature.

nature. *Whether there be prophecies*, ſays he, *they ſhall fail*; that is, they ſhall be completed, and ſo at an end: *whether there be tongues, they ſhall ceaſe*—the uſe of no earthly language ſhall be wanted: *whether there be knowledge, it ſhall vaniſh away*; for, as the apoſtle proceeds to argue, *when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part ſhall be done away. But charity*, he tells us, *never faileth*: it is unextinguiſhed by death—it triumphs over the grave: we carry it with us to heaven, and there only it is complete and perfect.

Upon the whole then we ſee, that if we wiſh to pleaſe God, by living up to the religion we profeſs, we muſt put on charity as the *bond of perfectneſs*—as that virtue which muſt *tie* all other virtues cloſely *to us*—which muſt unite us with each other in this world, and with God Almighty in the next.

III. LET us then, *laſtly*, conſider—which is the great conſideration of all—whether we are poſſeſſed of this excellent diſpoſition?

In the firſt place, have we ſuch a charity as *ſuffereth long, and is kind?* Have we learned, my brethren, that goſpel-leſſon, to return evil with

with good? Do we flame out into the exceſſes of anger?—do we meditate revenge?—do we rejoice in the misfortunes of an adverſary, and liſten to no offers of reconciliation? If theſe be the feelings of our hearts, we may depend upon it they are not yet inſtructed in that charity which the goſpel requires.

Again, have we that charity that *envieth not—that vaunteth not itſelf—that is not puffed up—that doth not behave itſelf unſeemly?* Do we diſcover any thing like envy in our own breaſts? Do we ever feel a ſecret pleaſure in the misfortunes of others, merely becauſe they are richer, or better, or more taken notice of than ourſelves? Let us ſearch our hearts; and if we do, let us immediately ſhut them out among the greateſt diſturbers of our own quiet, and the greateſt corruptors of every religious ſentiment.

Again, if we are advanced in life, are we inſolent and overbearing to our inferiors? Are we lifted up by the little advantages of ſtation or fortune? Do we behave with that diſguſting pride, which ſhews the high opinion we have of ourſelves, and our contempt for others? If we ſuffer any of theſe things to get poſſeſſion of our hearts,

hearts, we may assure ourselves, that we have not yet attained that charity which the apostle describes.

Again, let us consider whether we have such a charity, as *seeketh not its own.* Do we endeavour to make others happy around us; or have we that selfishness which cares little who is in want, if we are not in want ourselves; or if we are in health, cares not who around us is sick? If we feel in ourselves a disposition leading us into these selfish sentiments, we may assure ourselves we have not yet attained that charity which the apostle describes.

Again, is our charity such as is *not easily provoked—as thinketh no evil—as rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth?* Or, on the other hand, are we able to bear the little affronts and peevish humours of others; or are we apt, on every trifling occasion, to take offence, and turn each little circumstance which has no meaning in it, or next to none, into an affront? Are we peevish and sullen in our families at home, distressing those with our ill-humours who are unfortunately connected with us? Can we see a neighbour in misfortune, though brought on by

by his own folly, and feel a pleaſure in comparing our own prudence and happineſs with his diſtreſs?—Or, on the other hand, does our happineſs ariſe chiefly from thoſe ſources which the truths of religion, and, of courſe, the offices of humanity, ſuggeſt?——By theſe queſtions we may try our hearts, whether they poſſeſs that charity which the apoſtle deſcribes.

Laſtly, is our charity ſuch as *beareth all things—endureth all things—believeth all things—hopeth all things?* Or, do we feel ourſelves forward in telling abroad every bad thing we hear of an erring neighbour? Are we pleaſed with an opportunity of carrying it about as news? Are we always ready to put a bad conſtruction, rather than a good one, upon our neighbour's actions? Have we never any little favourable circumſtance to add that may leſſen his guilt? And, when the matter touches ourſelves, when any little unhandſome thing is ſaid of us, can we bear it patiently, leaving our good lives to beat it down?—If we cannot do all this, we may aſſure ourſelves we have not yet made the proficiency we ought in that charity which the apoſtle recommends.

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Let us then, my brethren, try ourſelves in this important matter, by the rules the apoſtle hath given us. Theſe notices of duty are our beſt way-marks to lead us forward to our bleſſed home. Working miracles, ſpeaking with tongues, and underſtanding all myſteries, we are told, are of no effect without charity. Let *us* then, who have none of theſe gifts, endeavour to have ſo much more of that virtue which is ſuperior to them all, and which without them will qualify us, we hope, through the merits of Chriſt, for God's favour.

On the other hand, let us reflect how noble an incitement it ſhould be to us, that by the attainment of this holy diſpoſition, which it is in every body's power to attain, the loweſt amongſt us, however mean his condition and however unfurniſhed his mind, may make himſelf more pleaſing in the ſight of God, than even a prophet or an apoſtle without it.

Let us beware, however, of making compariſons; for it is not, we know, the language of charity to cry out, *God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are.* Let us not then employ ourſelves in forming judgments of others, but in amending ourſelves. The beſt of us will find employ-

employment enough at home; beſeeching God, above all things, in the words of that excellent collect of our church, that *he would ſend his Holy Ghoſt, and pour into our hearts that moſt excellent gift of charity—the very bond of peace and of all virtues; without which, whoſoever liveth is counted dead before him.*

SERMON VII.

2 SAM. xii. 7.

AND NATHAN SAID UNTO DAVID, THOU ART THE MAN.

NOTHING can ſhew the frailty of human nature in a ſtronger light, than the ſtory of Nathan and David, which you have juſt heard read in the leſſon of the day *.—David, no doubt, after the commiſſion of his horrid crimes, had leſſened them to himſelf as much as he could, by little excuſes and ſhuffling apologies. This is ſufficiently intimated in the hiſtory. His adultery, and vile ingratitude to a faithful ſervant, he could not poſſibly excuſe—he does not attempt it; but the death of Uriah admitted of ſome defence. Though David could not but know in his heart

* Sixth Sunday after Trinity.

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he was the cauſe of Uriah's death, by ordering him to be placed *in the fore front of the battle*, and there to be deſerted; yet it is plain he endeavoured to wipe off the guilt from himſelf. He had a right to ſend his ſoldiers on any ſervice he thought proper; and if they fell, it was not his fault—they died in their profeſſion. Thus he tells his general, Joab, *not to be diſpleaſed at this matter*—that is, at the death of Uriah; *for the ſword devoureth one as well as another*—that is, he had fallen by the chance of war, and there was an end of the affair.—With ſome deluſion of this kind, it is probable, David had been endeavouring to deceive himſelf, when the prophet Nathan ſtood before him, and, to make him his own judge, propoſed a caſe, which in cruelty and wickedneſs bore ſome reſemblance, though but a diſtant one, to his own:

Two men, ſaid the Prophet, lived in the ſame city; one was rich, and the other poor. A gueſt coming to the houſe of the rich man, he ſpared his own flocks and herds to entertain him; but violently took from his poor neighbour an ewe lamb, which he had brought up, and tenderly nurſed in his family.—David, who in all caſes, except his own, could judge very accurately,

eaſily ſaw the injuſtice of ſuch an action. There was nothing in this matter to draw his judgment aſide: the cruelty of ſo wanton a piece of robbery appeared to him in its true colours, and he gave ſentence like a righteous judge: *His anger was greatly kindled againſt the man; and he ſaid to Nathan, As the Lord liveth, the man that hath done this thing ſhall ſurely die.* But how was he confounded when the Prophet anſwered, *Thou art the man!* He had never looked into his *own* heart while the Prophet was ſpeaking to him; he ſaw not, the gueſt coming to the houſe of the rich man was his own baſe paſſion—that his poor neighbour was Uriah; and the ewe lamb, his wife. His thoughts were entirely occupied by what he thought the caſe of another ſinner; and was blind to his own crime, which was much greater than that againſt which he had paſſed ſo righteous a ſentence.

This ſtory of David is one of the ſtrongeſt inſtances of ſelf-deceit; and I ſhall take occaſion from it, in the following diſcourſe, to make a few obſervations: *firſt*, on our aptneſs to deceive ourſelves; *ſecondly*, on the danger that attends ſuch ſelf-deceit; and, *thirdly*, on the proper means to prevent it.

Our aptneſs to deceive ourſelves proceeds entirely from ſelf-love. If it was not that we love ourſelves better than our neighbour, we ſhould be as quick-ſighted to our *own* faults as we are to his. But ſelf-love blinds us. As parents are blind to the blemiſhes of their children, and ſkreen them often under harmleſs names, ſo are we blind to our faults, and have a thouſand excuſes for them; which neither ſhew *their* nature nor *our* guilt, but merely our own *ſelf-love*.—Perhaps all your neighbours know you lead a ſottiſh life: you ſpend much of your time, and much of your money, in company and liquor: you loſe your buſineſs, as few people care to have dealings with a man who can be ſo little depended on: your family ſuffers: in ſhort, you have made yourſelf a very contemptible fellow. Yet ſtill you ſtand high in your own eſteem. You have your excuſes always ready. Perhaps you can afford to ſpend your money, ſo that you injure nobody but yourſelf; as if the kinder God is to you, the more right you have to ſquander what he gives. Or perhaps, though you may have been ſometimes guilty of a little exceſs, yet it has been very ſeldom, and never without a good reaſon: you were fatigued, and wanted a

little refreſhment; or, you juſt ſtepped in to talk with a neighbour on buſineſs; or, in ſhort, there was ſomething which makes your offence very trifling in your own eyes, though the real cauſe was neither more nor leſs than a love for liquor; and every body ſees it but yourſelf.

Again, it is ſuſpected that you have not always been quite ſo honeſt as you ſhould have been; that your bargains have not always been fair and open; that you have ſometimes endeavoured to over-reach a neighbour ſecretly, where you knew the law could not touch you; that you have taken the advantage of the ignorance of a purchaſer, to charge more than you knew your commodity was worth; that you have praiſed the commodity you ſold for qualities which you well knew it did not poſſeſs.—Now, though you know all this to be true, you will probably leſſen it in your own eyes by a thouſand little ſhuffling excuſes. Let the purchaſer (you may ſuggeſt to yourſelf) mind his buſineſs; I mind mine: I do not impoſe upon him, he impoſes on himſelf; he ſhould examine what he buys; I am not to teach him his buſineſs: am I to be both buyer and ſeller?—there is an art in every thing—there is an art of buying, and an art of ſelling;

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and a man muſt live by his art.—By ſuch ſelf-deceit you can eaſily impoſe on yourſelf; but how are your evaſions overturned by one plain queſtion, which an honeſt conſcience would ſuggeſt! Suppoſe a perſon ſhould treat you in this way? Suppoſe he ſhould ſell you an unſound beaſt for a ſound one, or a piece of damaged goods for what ought to have been perfect, and allege all the excuſes which you have juſt alleged, would *you* be impoſed upon by them? Would you, in ſhort, call him an honeſt man; or would not you be more inclined, as I verily ſuppoſe you would, to think him, with all his fine excuſes, an arrant knave?

You ſee then, my brethren, how ſelf-love impoſes on us, and makes the ſame thing, or nearly the ſame thing, appear trifling in ourſelves, which appeared ſo offenſive in our neighbour. You ſee how difficult it is for any one to ſay to himſelf, *Thou art the man;* though each of us is ready enough to condemn an offending brother.

Let me then now, as I propoſed, *ſecondly*, ſhew you the great danger of ſuch ſelf-deceit; as it conſiſts in keeping us ignorant of ourſelves, we may be wicked, and yet ſuppoſe ourſelves

innocent. But it is not ignorance of our own ſtate, my brethren, that makes us innocent: the ſtate of our ſouls is balanced like the ſtate of our accounts. It is not merely taking it for granted, that we are in good circumſtances, that makes us ſo; we may be involved in debt, for any thing we know, unleſs we look into our affairs: juſt ſo with our ſouls—if we keep no account between what we do and what we ought to do, the balance, no doubt, may often be on the wrong ſide.—In travelling in the night along dangerous roads, ſuppoſe a man could poſſeſs himſelf, through ſome fool-hardineſs or ſelf-deceit, that he was ſafe, would that, think you, make him ſafe? If he knew nothing of the ground he trod, nor of the precipices and pits which he approached, in the midſt of his fancied ſecurity he might be on the brink of ruin. This is juſt the caſe of our ſouls, if we live in ſelf-deceit: we muſt feel our way—we muſt examine the ſtate of our ſouls by the rules of the goſpel, or we ſhall never ſee our danger while we live, and may die in a kind of guilty ſecurity.—I do not ſpeak here, obſerve, of hardened, abandoned ſinners—they are out of the queſtion; but of thoſe who lead only careleſs, deluded lives—who

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can ſee every body's faults but their own: it is not only the man who commits murder and adultery, and never repents, that is in a dangerous condition; ſin, of all kinds, is more or leſs dangerous: if it be not great in itſelf, yet, multiplied, it becomes great; or it certainly leads to ſomething great, if it be not examined and checked. People, in their worldly affairs, when they find a ſingle farthing wrong, if they are thorough maſters of their buſineſs, are never at reſt till they find the miſtake, knowing that one error, though ſlight, may produce errors that are great.—Would to God we were but half as much in earneſt in our ſpiritual affairs. Our forgotten farthings, one ſhould hope, God would pardon; but it is much to be feared, that among the beſt of us, there is many a pound in our ſpiritual accounts totally forgotten.

SINCE then the danger of ſelf-deceit is ſo great, let us take the beſt means we can to prevent it. This was the *laſt* point I propoſed to conſider.

As ſelf-love is the great cauſe of this deceit, let us endeavour to leave *ourſelves*, as much as poſſible, out of all our actions; and ſee how thoſe

thoſe actions would look if they were the actions of our neighbour. Thus, for inſtance, you have a cuſtom of telling about, as news, every thing you hear, whether it be good or bad—whether it be true or falſe—all goes as it comes, however injurious it may be to your neighbour's character; and no doubt, by giving your tongue this unbridled liberty, it *is* often very injurious to your neighbour's character.—But *your* tongue is licenſed. Put yourſelf, therefore, out of the queſtion. Let the ſame thing be ſaid wantonly of you, and you will take it up as it deſerves. Endeavour, therefore, to conſider every caſe of your own as the caſe of another perſon, and you will clearly ſee how ſelf-love miſleads you.

Another thing, which may be of great uſe in preventing ſelf-deluſion, is, never to compare yourſelves with others; but to compare your actions only with your duty. Many people ſeem to think, if they are but hedged round with ſuch as they imagine worſe than themſelves, they are ſafe; as if the vices of other people added virtues to them. Juſt as an old man often rates his ſecurity, by ſeeing others alive ſtill older than himſelf.—The Phariſee, in the goſpel, was very ready at this kind of reckoning: he never looked into

into his own heart—he knew nothing of the ſtate of his own ſoul: his method was eaſier: he compared himſelf with others whom he thought more wicked than himſelf, and would cry out, God, I thank thee that I am not as this man is. But in making ſuch compariſons we, as well as the Phariſee, may be miſtaken.——I ſhould add, however, that in comparing our actions with our duty we are ſtill liable, without care, to deluſion. We often ſtudy to make the commandment as favourable to ourſelves as we can: every part, which we think does not much affect us, is plain and eaſy; but when we meet with paſſages which ſeem to go hard againſt us, we are ready to employ all our wit in giving them interpretations contrary to the obvious one: and moſt men are excellent lawyers in their ſpiritual caſes; and can twiſt the goſpel with admirable dexterity, ſo as to avoid its force—at leaſt to perſuade themſelves they avoid it; for our interpretations, we muſt always remember, make no alteration in the rules of the goſpel.

The laſt mean I ſhall mention to prevent ſelf-deluſion, is to fix in ourſelves a ſtrong ſenſe of the natural depravity and deceitfulneſs of our hearts—to open thoſe deceitful hearts daily to God

God in prayer—to confeſs our ſins before him—to implore his forgiveneſs through the merits of our bleſſed Redeemer, and to beg the aſſiſtance of his Holy Spirit. By opening our hearts *to God* we open them *to ourſelves*, and ſee the true ſtate of our ſouls: and this is one of the greateſt advantages we derive from the humble confeſſion of our ſins before God.

THE concluſion then, on the whole, my brethren, is juſt this:—We are naturally apt to impoſe on ourſelves; but, whatever our ſins are, our impoſing on ourſelves will not blot them out, nor ſkreen them from God. The only queſtion then is, ſhall we endeavour to remove our guilt in this world; or ſhall we, by impoſing on ourſelves, leave it to appear againſt us in the next?—This is the ſingle point you have to conſider. If you think it expedient to remove your guilt in this world, and blot it out, through the mercies of Chriſt, before you appear in the next, you muſt firſt be careful not to *impoſe* on yourſelves. Let the remarkable ſtory, which hath given occaſion to this diſcourſe, have its weight with you: let it teach you how very liable the heart of man is to ſelf-deluſion, even in the greateſt

greateſt matters—much more in ſmaller: but let it teach you alſo, that when you have ſinned, to ſearch out the ſpirit, and repent. David had ſinned horribly in the ſight of God; and where the text takes him up, he was ſtill in the height of his deluſion: but his whole life after, as far as we can judge, was a life of repentance. Where ſhall we find ſuch expreſſive ſorrow for ſin as in his penitential pſalms, when he *went mourning all the day long*, and at night *watered his couch with his tears*. His ſins might have been recorded not only to teach us penitence, but to teach us never to deſpair: the greateſt ſin, on repentance and a change of life, may be forgiven through the merits of Chriſt. Each of *us* hath in his own breaſt that prophet, which will on every occaſion tell him honeſtly, as Nathan told David, *Thou art the man*. To this monitor let us at all times liſten; and may God Almighty give us grace ſo to attend its warning voice, that we may make our peace here, before all opportunity is loſt for ever!

SERMON VIII.

[Preached on the Faſt Day, Feb. 25, 1795.]

PSALM XCVII. 1.

THE LORD IS KING: THE EARTH MAY BE GLAD THEREOF; YEA, THE MULTITUDE OF THE ISLES MAY BE GLAD THEREOF.

THIS pſalm is ſuppoſed to have been written by king David, on the occaſion of a victory. He attributes nothing to his own power, but refers all the glory to God. To God, likewiſe, he attributes all the misfortunes that befal the wicked, either as puniſhment or as trial. The holy Prophet therefore rejoices in the idea that God, whether he gives proſperity or adverſity, governs every thing. *The Lord is king: the earth may be glad thereof; yea, the multitude of the iſles may be glad thereof.*

I ſhall

I ſhall conſider theſe words by ſhewing you, *firſt*, what is meant by the *Lord's being king*; *ſecondly*, on what foundation the *earth, and multitude of the iſles, may be glad thereof*; and, *laſtly*, I ſhall make an application to ourſelves.

In the *firſt* place, *the Lord is king*, as he is the governor of all nature: all created things are under his control, and are only the inſtruments of his government. In his vaſt ſtorehouſe he has ſtorms, infected air, earthquakes, and various other evils: he has likewiſe calm ſkies, fruitful ſhowers, and abundant harveſts. In ſhort, proſperity and adverſity, in every ſhape; and even the wickedneſs of man, *ſo far as it affects mankind*, (his own actions being always free,) are only various means by which God tries, puniſhes, and rewards the children of men.

Again, *the Lord is king* over mankind, as divided into *nations*. Men form themſelves into various governments, and amuſe themſelves with the wiſdom with which their ſeveral ſchemes are conducted; but, in fact, all their governments and all their ſchemes are only the adminiſtrations of this great Ruler. Kings may ſuppoſe they govern, and generals may ſuppoſe they conquer; but

but it is God that giveth power to the one, and force to the other, and conducts all their purpoſes to his own wiſe ends.

The *Lord is king* alſo over men, conſidered as individuals. There are various ſtations in the world—high and low, rich and poor; and men ſuppoſe their own wiſdom, induſtry, and prudence, procure them their various diſtinctions in life: but if we believe that the *Lord is king*, and that he ruleth the affairs of mankind, we muſt believe alſo, that nothing happens without his direction.

Thus the *Lord is king* over all nature—over mankind in general, not only in a ſtate of ſociety, but as individuals alſo.

But here, perhaps, ſome may object, that if the *Lord is king*, and ruleth every thing, what occaſion have we to do any thing? Why ſhould the rulers of a country concern themſelves about national affairs; or private men, about their ſeveral employments? All they do ſignifies nothing. The Lord is king, and he will govern the affairs of nations and men as he pleaſeth, whether themſelves act, or not.

This is falſe reaſoning. We do not know *what God intends*; but we know *what he orders us*

us to do, and therefore at any rate we ſhould obey him. The ſame God, who ordereth the affairs of nations and men, ordereth us alſo to uſe our wiſdom and prudence, and every capacity which he hath given us. *Our actions*, like every thing elſe, are *God's inſtruments*: by theſe he brings about the great purpoſes of his will. What theſe purpoſes are, we know not; but of this we may be aſſured, that, by obeying or diſobeying him, we may turn ourſelves into *good* inſtruments, or *bad*: *his* inſtruments, certainly, in ſome ſhape we muſt be. If the wicked man therefore ſkreen his wickedneſs by ſaying, that God turns his vices into benefits, let him conſider what the ſcripture ſays, *It muſt needs be that offences come; but woe be to that man by whom the offence cometh.* God does *not make men wicked*; but if *they make themſelves wicked*, he turns their wickedneſs to his own wiſe purpoſes.

Again, if a man pretend to ſay, he hath accompliſhed any thing by his own wiſdom or power, he is equally miſtaken. The *Lord is king*, and for his own great purpoſes beſtows wiſdom, and power; which, at the ſame time the poſſeſſor may turn, if he pleaſe, to his own advantage: as, in common life, a factor may contribute to

carry on ſome general ſcheme of buſineſs for the perſon who employs him, and yet, at the ſame time, may receive a fair proportion himſelf from the emoluments of his office.

HAVING thus ſeen that *the Lord is king*, let us, *ſecondly*, ſee for what reaſon *the earth, and the multitude of the iſles, may be glad thereof.*

If we were to ſee a country without any government, where every one did what was good in his own eyes; that is, where rapine, ſpoil, and miſchief of all kinds, would naturally exiſt — where there was no ſenſe of duty to check, no laws to reſtrain, nor magiſtrates to puniſh — how miſerable would be the ſtate of that country; and how happy would every man think himſelf, if order were introduced, and his life and property rendered ſafe!

In ſuch a ſituation would this world be, if the *Lord was not king*. What, can we ſuppoſe, would be the effect, if the things of this world were governed by chance? We ſee what power the elements have — what terrible effects are ſometimes produced by ſtorms and earthquakes, by tides and ſubterranean fires! When therefore we ſee all theſe dreadful effects of the elements,

ments, which God occaſionally permits for his own wiſe reaſons, what, might we conceive, would be the ruin occaſioned by ſuch furious inſtruments, if they had no ruler to direct them? —Again, when we ſee the dreadful havoc which nations make among themſelves—the wars and bloodſhed they occaſion—when we ſee the horrid miſchiefs which the paſſions of men continually occaſion, what, could we ſuppoſe, would be the direful effect, if there was no ruler to reſtrain the violence of nations, or to oppoſe the wickedneſs of man?—*But the Lord is king: the earth may be glad thereof; yea, the multitude of the iſles may be glad thereof.* Though he puniſh the children of men by their own wickedneſs, yet that wickedneſs has a *meaſure to be filled up*, beyond which it cannot go—though he puniſh them by the fury of the elements, yet unleſs he reſtrained thoſe elements within their proper bounds, they would continue to make the moſt dreadful havoc—they *can* go no farther than he allows: *winds* and *ſtorms* may rage; but they muſt always *fulfil his word*—the tides of the ocean may overflow; but they always have their *bounds*, *which they cannot paſs*.

Good men in particular may rejoice that the *Lord is king*. In whatever circumſtances they are placed—amidſt the fury of elements, or the rage of men—however melancholy the times may be—or, however afflicted they themſelves may be, from the loſs of fortune, health, or friends; ſtill they are comforted in the thought, that the *Lord is king*, who will protect them with a parent's care; and, with the ſame providence with which he reſtrains the tides of the ocean, will prevent any misfortune coming near them, that is not intended for their good.—Well, therefore, may the earth, and eſpecially its pious inhabitants, rejoice that they are in the hands of a God who hath all nature under his controul, and will aſſuredly never ſuffer it, in any part, to exceed his own wiſe purpoſes—well may they all join in the Pſalmiſt's triumphant ſong, *The Lord is king: the earth may be glad thereof; yea, the multitude of the iſles may be glad thereof.*

LET us now, *laſtly*, make our application.—If, among *the multitude of the iſles*, there is one iſle which hath been more particularly favoured by the Almighty—if there is an iſle which hath been honoured with the pure doctrines of the goſpel,

gospel, while many other countries are ſtill overſpread with darkneſs—if it hath been favoured with numberleſs temporal bleſſings—if it be ſecured by its happy ſituation from numberleſs dangers—if it hath enjoyed its liberty, when moſt of the nations around have been enſlaved—if it hath been exalted to the greateſt height of power and wealth—if it hath been defended by the hand of Providence from many dangers which threatened both its temporal and ſpiritual happineſs—if to this day it ſtill exiſts, in the height of its power, a monument of God's favour—what gratitude does this iſle owe to its great Governor and Protector! Whatever the *multitude of the iſles* may do, this iſle has ſurely ground enough to be glad that *the Lord is king*.

How then, ſhould we ſuppoſe, the inhabitants of this iſle would naturally behave, after receiving ſuch multiplied mercies? We ſhould imagine that, with all thankfulneſs, they would acknowledge that the *Lord is king*—that to him they would refer all their proſperity—that it ſhould be the pride of their hearts to ſtudy the revelation of his will, and be ſolicitous to make it the guide of their actions.

And, no doubt, there are numbers in this favoured iſland who are truly ſenſible of the bleſſings they enjoy, and ſhew their gratitude by a pious obedience to God's laws. But I fear, if our Saviour's net, which *gathered of every kind*, were thrown over us, there would be multitudes fit only to be *caſt away*. The *love of money*, and the *love of pleaſure*, are the two great evils which infect a rich nation. Almoſt every wicked conception is ſtirred up, and kindled into a flame, by one or other of theſe debaſing principles. Oppreſſion, avarice, and fraud in every ſhape, attend the *former*; while the train of the *latter* is followed by prodigality, voluptuouſneſs, and every mode of diſſipation. Both theſe principles often take full poſſeſſion of a man, and when they do, they cannot claim the protection of the Lord for their king.

When ſuch principles pervade the higher ranks, the lower, we may be aſſured, will follow. Vice never riſes from low to high: it is more its nature to deſcend; and the higher ranks may always be conſidered as the gauge of a nation. All the ſubtil arts of getting money, and the refined modes of ſpending it, are not found, it is true, among the lower ranks; but the

the dregs of wickedneſs deprave and corrupt, as much as its more ſubtil parts.—Let us, however, my brethren, rather look at home than abroad; and take a ſpecimen of the wickedneſs of the times from what we obſerve *among ourſelves*.

How fares religion amongſt us? In general, I fear, we have not much even of the *appearance* of it. The people of ancient times were ready to give up their lives for their religion: people now are as ready to give up their religion—not for their lives, but even for their diverſions. The bell tolls on Sundays; and many well-diſpoſed people, no doubt, conſider it as a call to worſhip God, and hear their duty explained: but what becomes of the reſt? you will find them perhaps loitering idly at home—or following ſome unlawful diverſion in the foreſt—or, probably, at the alehouſe: the bell which calls others to worſhip God, gives them only a greater reliſh for wickedneſs.

Few virtues ſurvive the decay of religion. A ſort of decorum of manners, among the higher claſſes of mankind, hath ſomewhat the appearance of virtue, though it is but an appearance; yet even this appearance is removed among the lower ranks. We ſee drunkenneſs ſtaggering about in open day—we hear loud converſations

made up of obſcenity, ſwearing, curſing, and blaſphemy—we ſee family-quarrels, abuſe, ſpiteful actions, and ill neighbourhood. Vice ſcorns to wear any diſguiſe, when religion alone takes account of actions. When the law, indeed, ſteps in, men are more cautious. How long is it ago—not very long—ſince I heard of a neighbour's horſe being killed in the night? What a mind muſt that wretch have, who could commit ſo malicious and wicked an action, from which he could receive no advantage himſelf, merely to gratify a horrid ſpirit of revenge! Another wicked fellow was obliged to fly the country for theft; while another, I believe his companion, was taken and convicted. And, the other day, ſome wicked perſon put abroad an incendiary letter, threatening death, and burning of houſes—but for what, I could not diſcover. They who were able had juſt made a ſubſcription to lower the price of bread, which I hoped had given general ſatisfaction: but malice is a vice without either gratitude or feeling.

Theſe things, my brethren, ſhew that we of this place are not clear of that guilt which hangs over the land. Corruption inſinuates itſelf into the manners of men by degrees. Human nature will

will always be wicked; but where people are not greatly corrupted, ſuch wickedneſs and crimes as I have been deſcribing do not often appear; when they do, I ſhould fear they ſhew corruption has ſpread very deep. And though the greater part of you, no doubt, abhor ſuch heights of wickedneſs, yet the beſt amongſt us hath ſtill great reaſon to call himſelf to account.

Let us then all endeavour to take our own ſins, at leaſt, from the burden of the land: it has guilt enough to weigh it down without ours. Nor let any one think *his* ſins will be loſt in the general maſs. No; they will certainly increaſe it. They may, for any thing we know, be that addition that will turn the ſcale againſt us. Ten righteous perſons might once have ſaved a city: God knows how many it may require to ſave ſuch a country as this. Let us, however, ſtrive to be among thoſe righteous few; and not provoke God to bring his judgments upon us, as he has always done on wicked and corrupt nations.—A people is armed againſt us, whom we never yet feared; but, if God forſake us, they may be a dreadful inſtrument of his wrath.—Let us then endeavour to avert that wrath, before

fore it be yet too late; that we may be able, from our hearts, to join in the triumphant song of the text, *The Lord is king: the earth may be glad thereof; yea, the multitude of the isles* (and our own in particular) *may be glad thereof.*

SERMON IX.

MAT. v. 34.

BUT I SAY UNTO YOU, SWEAR NOT AT ALL.

I DESIGN, in the following diſcourſe, to ſhew you the great wickedneſs of common ſwearing. I ſhall endeavour, as far as I can, to deter the young ſinner from forming habits of this vice; and, if it be in my power, to reclaim the old one.—I ſhall *firſt*, therefore, ſhew you the wickedneſs of common ſwearing; and, *ſecondly*, I ſhall exhort thoſe who practiſe it to lay it aſide.

THE firſt argument againſt the wickedneſs of common ſwearing may be taken from its tendency to perjury, by making a ſolemn oath received with leſs reverence.

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An oath reverently taken in a court of juſtice, and upon a ſolemn occaſion, is in fact an act of religion. It is an appeal to the great God of heaven, whom we call upon to be witneſs of the truth of what we are going to ſay. It is an acknowledgment, therefore, that we believe God knows our hearts, and will puniſh our falſehood. And in this light it is, that the Apoſtle tells us, *An oath for confirmation puts an end to all ſtrife.* It is making our laſt appeal to God Almighty—we can make no farther appeal. And indeed an oath has been in all governments, heathen as well as chriſtian, conſidered as the ſtricteſt bond by which a man can poſſibly be tied, and the beſt ſecurity which we can give to thoſe with whom we may have any important dealings.—If a ſolemn oath then be acknowledged an act of religion, common ſwearing may well be reckoned an act of impiety, becauſe it manifeſtly tends to make a ſolemn oath cheap and contemptible.—You muſt all ſee, without farther reaſoning, that the more a man uſes himſelf to ſwearing, the leſs reverence he will have for an oath. He who makes ſwearing a part of his ordinary converſation, will hardly, I ſhould think, pay

any reverence to an oath, on the moſt awful occaſion.—I have heard of people who have accuſtomed themſelves to take medicines till medicine had no effect upon them.

Thus common ſwearing has a tendency to make you think too lightly of oaths, and ſo leads to perjury.—But it has a tendency to perjury in a ſtill more direct way. The common ſwearer, I ſuppoſe, hardly knows when he ſwears; and muſt undoubtedly, in the courſe of his converſation, ſwear to many a falſehood. Does any of you believe it poſſible, that a common ſwearer is always ſo guarded as to weigh deliberately every oath he takes? and that he performs every action to which he binds himſelf by his raſh oaths? I fear not: he has gotten ſuch a habit of ſwearing, that his oaths burſt, in a manner, involuntarily from him. I have myſelf often heard people ſwear to the truth of things which I knew were falſe; and ſo, I ſuppoſe, have you. And is it not a dreadful conſideration, think you, that a man is thus daily heaping up perjuries upon his head? When you ſwear you will do a thing, you bind yourſelf to the performance of it by the moſt ſacred of all obligations. If the thing you have ſworn to be unlawful, you are certainly

certainly not bound: but to whatever miſchievous inconvenience your oath may lead you, you muſt certainly diſcharge it, or be guilty of perjury. This was the caſe of the wicked Herod, when for his oath's ſake he murdered John the Baptiſt. We ought, in theſe caſes, to repent of the firſt ſin, but not to make it worſe by adding another to it.

And, think you, is the common ſwearer always ſo guarded? does he never, think you, ſwear to do a thing, which he neither does, nor intends to do? If he does not, he is certainly more cautious than common ſwearers uſually are.—You may ſay, perhaps, that you were but in jeſt; that you did not *intend* to perform the thing you ſwore to. You may ſay ſo, if you pleaſe; but you may as well pretend to ſay, that you committed a murder or a highway robbery in jeſt: the thing itſelf is forbidden; and if you tranſgreſs the commandments of God, it ſignifies very little whether you tranſgreſs them with a laughing face, or a ſerious one.

But though ſwearing may not have this bad conſequence, of leading us into perjury, yet in itſelf it is a very wicked practice, from its being directly oppoſite to the commands of our bleſſed Saviour.

Saviour. To quote any other paſſages of ſcripture would be needleſs, when our Saviour's own words in the text are ſo expreſs to the point, and ſhew ſo plainly that it is a practice he entirely diſapproves. This is ſo ſtrong an argument againſt it, that no chriſtian ſhould deſire another—*I ſay unto you, ſwear not at all*, is ſo plain a command that it cannot be miſtaken. In ſome caſes a man may doubt whether he be in the right or not: the limits between good and bad may be ſo nice, that it is not every one who can diſtinguiſh them. But the practice of common ſwearing, my brethren, is ſo directly forbidden by Chriſt, that he who tranſgreſſes, ſins with his eyes wide open.—And here, let me add, that our Saviour not only forbids us to ſwear by our Maker, but by every thing elſe: *Swear not by heaven*, ſays he, *for it is God's throne; neither by the earth, for it is his footſtool; neither by Jeruſalem, for it is the city of the great King: but let your communication* (that is, your common converſation) *be yea, yea; nay, nay: for whatſoever is more than theſe, cometh of evil.*—By theſe expreſſions our bleſſed Lord intimates to us, that all raſh and irreverent ſwearing in our common converſation, by any of the creatures

tures of God, is conſidered as an equal affront to the majeſty of God, as if we ſwore by God himſelf: for it muſt mean that, or it means nothing. In our common converſation therefore, our Saviour adds, we have nothing to do with ſwearing at all: we have only to aſſert that a thing is ſo, or is not ſo. Let your communication be *yea, yea*, or *nay, nay*; if we go beyond that, and confirm what we ſay by an oath, we are plainly told it is evil.

Under this head we may take notice of a practice, which many people indulge, of mentioning the name of God in common converſation, in a light, irreverent manner: they cannot wonder, for inſtance, without crying out, Good God! This is certainly taking God's name in vain: his name ſhould never be mentioned, but in the moſt ſerious manner.

SINCE then the wickedneſs of ſwearing, my brethren, is evidently ſo great—ſince it tends to make oaths in a court of juſtice leſs reſpected—ſince it evidently tends to perjury, and ſince in itſelf, and in its ſimpleſt form, it is abſolutely, and in the moſt poſitive manner, forbidden by our bleſſed Saviour, let us have that

ſenſe of the heinouſneſs of it, which ſo great a ſin deſerves. Let me endeavour therefore, as I propoſed, *ſecondly*, to exhort you againſt it.

And, in the firſt place, it is no ſmall aggravation of this ſin, that we have no kind of temptation to commit it. That men ſhould cheat, that they ſhould lie, that they ſhould ſteal, and that they ſhould drink, is not ſo *much* to be wondered at; we have here, at leaſt, the temptations of a wicked, corrupt nature, to lead us aſtray. All theſe vices, we ſuppoſe at leaſt, procure us ſome preſent pleaſure, or ſome worldly advantage; and though it is a wretched thing to give up our ſouls for preſent pleaſure, or a little worldly advantage, yet ſtill the thing, I ſay, is not ſo ſurprizing. But that men ſhould learn to curſe and to ſwear, is beyond meaſure aſtoniſhing, becauſe they can have no temptation to it: ſwearing gratifies none of your paſſions—it indulges none of your appetites—there is in nature no kind of foundation for it; ſo that the common ſwearer ſeems to ſin merely and entirely for the ſake of being wicked, without any kind of view to any kind of advantage. What! have you not ſins enough to anſwer for

for in the ſight of God, which you are led into by the natural depravity of your corrupt nature, that you need run unneceſſarily into others? Need you tell God Almighty to his face, that you will diſobey him, merely, and for no other reaſon, but becauſe you will do it? If there is any thing that deſerves the puniſhment of God more than this, I know not what it is.—You will excuſe yourſelf, perhaps, by ſaying you were in a paſſion—you were provoked beyond bearance, and could not help ſwearing: it is a miſtake—you might have helped it. You rarely, I believe, ever heard a man ſwear, even in a *paſſion*, who had not in ſome degree gotten this habit of it before.—It is true, there are degrees in this vice, as there are in all others. Some men are ſuch wicked, abandoned wretches, that they ſwear at all times—their whole converſation is made up of oaths and imprecations. Others, indeed, are not *ſo* bad: they have gotten a cuſtom indeed of ſwearing; but in general they have ſome decency, and ſeldom ſwear but when their paſſions are a little raiſed: but if they had never, at any time of their lives, addicted themſelves to this vice, depend upon it an oath would

not

not come *ſo glibly* from their mouths, even in a paſſion.—But let me aſk any of you, who may be ſo ready to excuſe ſwearing, by your being in a paſſion, Suppoſe you were before any perſon whom you greatly reſpected; or, ſuppoſe any perſon ſhould offer you a ſum of money for avoiding ſwearing; or, ſhould puniſh you ſeverely for every *oath you ſware* in your paſſion; would you not, think you, avoid ſwearing, even when provoked to the higheſt? I verily believe you would.—There is ſome other reaſon then that prevents your avoiding ſwearing, beſides your being in a paſſion. Shall I tell it you? It is plain you do not reverence God ſo much as man; nor value his favour ſo much as you do a ſum of money; nor fear his wrath ſo much as you do worldly puniſhment.—Do not ſay, then, you cannot avoid ſwearing when you are in a paſſion; but tell the truth plainly, that you think it not worth while to be at any pains to avoid it.

Let me endeavour then, if poſſible, to prevail with you to leave off this abominable vice. It ſits ill upon every perſon. In general, indeed, it is a vice that ſeldom goes alone: it is com-

monly the vice of profligate people—ſuch as have no fear of God before their eyes; noiſy, brawling, hardened fellows, who terrify thoſe beneath them, and are deſpiſed by every body elſe. You hardly, I ſuppoſe, know any of theſe curſing and ſwearing people, who are not bad men in other reſpects: they are drunkards, or they are given up to a looſe, diſorderly life; or are, in ſome way, a nuiſance to their neighbourhood. And if ever this vice is found in better people, where there is ſome good, it is always thought a great injury and blemiſh to them; and their neighbours cry out, how ſorry they are to ſee ſo many virtues clouded by ſuch a vice. And when you give the character of a good man, you commonly ſay, as a high praiſe, he was never heard to ſwear an oath in his life. Swearing therefore, I ſay, ſits ill upon all people; but if there are any that ſhould particularly avoid this ſhocking vice, it is thoſe who are at the head of families—who have children and ſervants to inſtruct, and keep in order. What a ſhocking thing is it to breed up your own children in vice!—to train them up in wickedneſs by your own example!—to be the devil's worſt agents in

fitting

fitting your own offspring for deſtruction! If you teach them no good, for God's ſake teach them no ill. Is it not enough, think you, to leave them to pick up vice as they can, but muſt you inſtruct them in it?—muſt you teach their infant tongues, by your example, till their lips begin glibly to form an oath? The caſe is the ſame with regard to the ſervants: it is the duty of maſters to have an eye upon their behaviour —to keep them to their duty, and make them go regularly to church; but inſtead of that, if they teach them to ſin by their example, I much fear that ſuch maſters will not only have their own ſins, but, in a degree, the ſins of others to anſwer for.

THUS I have endeavoured to deter you from the abominable practice of common ſwearing.—You will obſerve, I am not calling you to any heights of religion—I am not calling you, in our Saviour's language, to pluck out an eye or cut off a hand; I am calling upon you only for one of the firſt ſteps of a chriſtian life—that of not diſhonouring your Maker's name. Let me then hope that all who are addicted to this

wicked practice, or are in the way of it, will consider, and think upon what I have said against it; and for your own sakes, and for the sake of others, leave off a practice which can do you no good, and will most undoubtedly, if you repent not, nor leave it off, in the end lead you to ruin.

SERMON X.

LUKE, XV. 10.

THERE IS JOY IN THE PRESENCE OF THE ANGELS OF GOD OVER ONE SINNER THAT REPENTETH.

IN the parable from which this verſe is taken, our Saviour intended to ſhew the Jews that the Gentiles (repreſented by the prodigal ſon) ſhould be taken, on their repentance, into God's favour equally with themſelves.

But though this was the chief intention of the parable, yet, like many of our Saviour's parables, it had two views; and the former part, at leaſt, is capable of a much more general interpretation. In this light I propoſe to conſider it, and ſhall point out the ſeveral pieces of inſtruction that ariſe from it.

In the firſt place, we obſerve the conſtant readineſs we all ſhew to leave our father's houſe.—By our father's houſe, is meant that kind protection which good men always receive from God. And we argue and act in this caſe moſt commonly as the prodigal did. The ſober diſcipline of our father's houſe is too ſevere a bondage—we have paſſions and appetites which muſt be indulged—let us make an acquaintance with the world—it is time now to enjoy a little of life: theſe are the common deluſions that carry us all, more or leſs, into *a far country*—into the paths of pleaſure and indulgence. The father, no doubt, remonſtrated to the prodigal, as God doth to us in the goſpel, and let before him the kind intention of all the reſtraints that were put upon him; and probably, with a prophetic ſigh, forewarned him, that ſooner or later he ſhould repent his raſhneſs. All being ineffectual, the father knowing there are ſome people who can learn the leſſons of wiſdom only from experience, at length gave way; and the youth, we read, *gathering all together*, with a plentiful ſupply of folly and ſelf-ſufficiency, *took his journey into a far country*—and the farther from home the better: the greater diſtance he went from his father's houſe,

houſe, no doubt, he thought himſelf the more at liberty, and the nearer happineſs.

Let us follow him in this ſearch after happineſs. Every reſtraint was now removed; the world was all before him, and he entered it with that fame unthinking ſpirit with which he had left the kind protection of a father's houſe. Wherever the tabret and harp reſounded, wherever the voice of joy and mirth was heard, there was he in queſt of pleaſure, ſurrounded by the gay, the joyous, and the profligate. His paſſions were his conductors; and folly and extravagance went hand in hand with him, in all his motions.

It required no ſpirit of prophecy to foreſee the end. The next verſe recites it: *He waſted all his ſubſtance in riotous living.* And it had been marvellous had it been otherwiſe; for when our paſſions fairly take the lead, they ſeldom ſtop till they are ſtopped by the impoſſibility of proceeding.

It was not, however, our Saviour's intention to warn us againſt riot and extravagance, as the natural ſources of poverty and diſtreſs—this is a worldly leſſon—all the wiſe and prudent men of the world have this leſſon by rote. Our bleſſed

Saviour's

Saviour's meaning was ſpiritual: he meant to teach us, that when we once leave our father's houſe—that is, when we once, in earneſt, forſake the paths of religion, there is no ſaying where we may ſtop. We generally proceed headlong on. Our vicious habits get ſtronger—our paſſions become more ungovernable; and there is ſeldom a reformation, unleſs God ſhould pleaſe, in his goodneſs, to awaken us by calamity.

This was God's method of dealing with the unhappy prodigal. After he had ſpent all, the text tells us, *there aroſe a mighty famine in that land, and he began to be in want: and he went and joined himſelf to a citizen of that country, and he ſent him into his fields to feed ſwine; and he would fain have filled his belly with the huſks which the ſwine did eat; and no man gave unto him.*—Here was a falling-off indeed! The gay, the joyous youth, who purſued pleaſure in every ſhape, and counted days only as they diverſified his pleaſures, is now in want of the common neceſſaries of nature; and he who thought the kind reſtraints of his father a burden, is now forced to ſubmit to the greateſt ignominy and diſtreſs. And thus it will ever happen to us, when

when we give up religion and duty, and ſeek our happineſs from the world. Though for a while the pleaſures of ſin may captivate, and unlawful gain may bring its preſent advantage, yet, we may depend upon it, a time will come when ſin will aſſert its dominion: the *pleaſures* of ſin are the devil's *baits* merely to enſnare his ſervants; but he never means to treat them with indulgence. The difference, in this reſpect, between the ſervants of God and the ſervants of the devil, is this: the former are led through the gate of reſtraint to the manſions of happineſs; the latter, through the gate of pleaſure into the regions of deſpair. Sin is, in the end, the ſevereſt taſk-maſter we can ſerve: it conceals its wages indeed from ſight, becauſe they are bad; but we know well enough, and from the beſt authority, what wages they are: not ſuch a death as we daily ſee, the ſeparation of ſoul and body, but ſuch death as He inflicts, who *throws both ſoul and body into hell.*—It would be ſomething however gained, if the ſervants of ſin could be happy till the time of their death—if they could be ſure of enjoying their ſhort, ſcanty portion in this world: but even this is not the caſe; and we may talk, if we pleaſe, of the hardſhips

hardſhips of religion, but, depend upon it, we feel greater hardſhips inflicted on us by ſin.—Where one evil of life is brought upon us by God's appointment, a thouſand are brought upon us by ourſelves. Indeed, moſt of the evils of life are brought upon us by our own miſconduct. It is *this* moſt commonly, rather than God's viſitation, that ſends the prodigal into the fields to feed ſwine, and to wiſh in vain for the huſks.

After the prodigal had been reduced to this diſtreſs, we next read, *he came to himſelf*—that is, he came to a ſenſe of his own folly: he now ſaw clearly that he had been the author of his own ſufferings; and that what he imagined was his happineſs, had proved his ruin.—Alas! for the folly of mankind, that they can rarely *come to themſelves* without ſuffering under the rod of affliction. Our heavenly Father may ſhower all his kindneſſes upon us—it avails nothing—we continue rebellious children; but no ſooner is the hand of affliction laid upon us, than we come to ourſelves: neceſſity is a great tamer—it will humble the proudeſt heart.

After the prodigal had thus *come to himſelf*, the next ſtep was to make good reſolutions:—

I will

I will ariſe, and go to my father, and ſay unto him, Father, I have ſinned againſt heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy ſon. A good reſolution, however, is of no great value in *itſelf*—it is *generally* a plant without a root, and ſoon withers: a good reſolution contributes no more to our repentance, than the firſt ſtep of a journey towards bringing us to the end of it. A firſt ſtep in a journey, however, *muſt* be taken, before we can proceed; ſo that a good reſolution, though of no conſequence in itſelf, is however a matter of abſolute neceſſity, if we are in earneſt.

The poor prodigal before us *was* in earneſt. He not only ſaid, *I will ariſe and go*, but he *did* ariſe, and *did* go to his father, and laid the deep contrition of a penitent heart before him. It muſt have coſt him, no doubt, many a ſevere pang to bring down his proud heart to ſuch humiliation. The ſcoffs of thoſe who had ſeen him go off with ſo much pride and ſelf-ſufficiency, and now ſaw him return with ſo much diſgrace, he was ſure to meet: his father's juſt diſpleaſure he had too much reaſon to fear, and could hardly hope to find acceptance. And, no doubt, the devil would throw out new ſolicitations be-

fore him—it is his uſual way—and tempt him not to be diſheartened with the firſt misfortune, but to go on—to purſue the path of pleaſure, which would not again lead to ſo much diſappointment.

All ſuch ſolicitations were in vain. The penitent had not only happily taken his reſolution, but was determined to go on. With trembling heart he proceeded; and came once more in view of his father's houſe, full of every tender and humiliating ſentiment, which his father's often-experienced-indulgence, and his own deteſtable unworthineſs, could inſpire.

HAVING thus accompanied the prodigal through all his folly, his extravagance, his ſufferings, his good reſolutions, and his happy repentance, let us now change the ſcene, and ſee the father's behaviour on this tender occaſion. What might the youth have expected from a father whom he had ſo juſtly provoked? If not the extreme of anger and diſpleaſure, at leaſt a degree of coldneſs and reproach.—But how was the returning penitent miſtaken! When he was yet a *great way off, his father ſaw him and had compaſſion, and ran, and fell on his neck and kiſſed him.*—

What

What can the penitence of a ſinner even wiſh for more than ſuch kindneſs as this? And this is the return our heavenly Father makes to all, who *with hearty repentance, and true faith, turn unto him.* That gracious God, who, *when our father and mother forſake us, taketh us up*—ſees our penitence—meets the returning ſinner—dries our tears—receives us again as his own children, and, forgetting all the paſt, reſtores us once more to himſelf.——Thus God redeemed a loſt world through the death of Chriſt; and thus, through the ſame bleſſed atonement, he will redeem all his penitent children, who return to him with true faith, and a thorough change of heart and life.

Let us then conſider—let us conſider with religious attention, whenever we are apt to be miſled by the baits of pleaſure, this affecting ſtory. I have applied it, in general, to all; but let each of *us* bring it nearer home, and apply it to himſelf. Which of us is not, in ſome ſhape, a prodigal? We are all, in a greater or a leſs degree, inclined to leave our heavenly Father, and go in ſearch after happineſs among the follies of the world. When we feel ourſelves thus inclined,

inclined, let us remember the ſtory we have juſt heard—what ignominy, diſgrace, and ſuffering, will certainly await us! All this diſtreſs might have been avoided, if we had obſerved the paths of duty.—Let us then always conſider the protection of our heavenly Father as our only true home—as the great ſource of all our comfort—our only refuge in every diſtreſs; and if we ever do wander from it, (as who is there who does not often get wrong?) let us take the earlieſt opportunity to retreat. But if we are ever ſo unfortunate as entirely to leave it, let us in time, like the prodigal before us, think of returning, before the door is ſhut againſt us.—What encouragement has the ſinner to draw him to repentance! His converſion, we are told, occaſions joy even among the bleſſed inhabitants of heaven. His gracious Father, embracing him with the arms of mercy, receives him with thoſe kind expreſſions: *This my ſon was dead, and is alive again.* While holy angels, taking up the ſtrain, unite in harmony: This our brother was *dead, and is alive again; he was loſt, and is found.*

SERMON XI.

MAT. XX. 8.

SO WHEN EVEN WAS COME, THE LORD OF THE VINEYARD SAITH UNTO HIS STEWARD, CALL THE LABOURERS, AND GIVE THEM THEIR HIRE; BEGINNING FROM THE LAST UNTO THE FIRST. AND WHEN THEY CAME WHO HAD BEEN HIRED ABOUT THE ELEVENTH HOUR, THEY RECEIVED EVERY MAN A PENNY.

IN a late diſcourſe * I endeavoured to explain the caſe of the *thief on the croſs*, which hath induced many, it may be feared, to truſt in a death-bed repentance. I ſhall now conſider another paſſage of ſcripture—the parable of the labourers hired into the vineyard; which may, perhaps, be miſapplied in the ſame miſchievous way.

* See Vol. II. Serm. XXXV.

The general ſubſtance of the parable, you will recollect, is this:—

A houſeholder went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard. Such as he found, he agreed with by the day, at the price of the country *.

Some hours afterwards he went out again, and finding others unemployed, he ſent them alſo into his vineyard; and even, at a very late hour, finding others who could get no work, he hired them alſo. In the evening he paid all his workmen; and gave ſuch as had wrought only one hour, the ſame wages which he gave to thoſe who had laboured through the day.

"Now from this paſſage (ſays the man who wiſhes to find a cover for his ſins) it is evident we are not tied up ſo ſtrictly, as many ſuppoſe, to the duties of religion: the goſpel is more liberal. The labourers hired into their maſter's vineyard, we find, entered at different times, but

* The penny was a Roman coin, current among the Jews: it was worth about 7*d.* or 8*d.* of our money, and was the price of a day's labour in Judea. The good Samaritan therefore paid the hoſt about one ſhilling and fourpence in value; and as that ſum would purchaſe much more than the ſame ſum now, it was ſufficient for the purpoſe.

all

all received an equal reward. There is no difference made between him who laboured from an early hour, and him who laboured from a late one. And what can be meant by this, except that ſome men repent ſooner, and ſome later; but that a merciful God is as well inclined to accept the late penitent as the early one? Since this is the caſe," he cries, "we may ſafely defer our repentance till the eleventh hour, or later if need be; and if we then enter the vineyard—if we then repent, we may expect, from our Saviour's own promiſe, an equal reward with them who have laboured through the day."

A man's ſalvation is in a very deplorable ſtate, when he begins thus to tamper with the terms of ſalvation; and, inſtead of making his *practice* agree with his *religion*, ſets his wits at work to make his religion agree with his practice.—I hope none of you, my brethren, are in ſo dangerous a ſtate. However, as the leaſt fallacy in this point is in a high degree dangerous, I ſhall, in the following diſcourſe, endeavour to ſhew you, *firſt*, the meaning of the parable; from which it will appear that it furniſhes no argument for a late repentance; and ſhall, *ſecondly*, ſhew you

what kind of repentance alone is available in the ſight of God.

As to the meaning of the parable, it does not relate to chriſtians, but to heathens—not to thoſe who wilfully defer repentance, but to thoſe who were before ignorant of the truth of religion; to thoſe who were idle—not becauſe they *would not work*, but *becauſe no man had hired them.*

The Jews had long been God's peculiar people; but when our Saviour came into the world, that diſtinction was to be loſt, and the goſpel to be preached to all mankind. This great truth, however, which was ſo diſpleaſing to the Jews, our bleſſed Lord opened by degrees. He endeavoured to looſen the prejudices of men, ſometimes by leaving them to conjecture from obſcure hints, and ſometimes by giving them plainer ſimilitudes.

Among other diſcourſes of this tendency he here inſtructs the Jews, under the ſimilitude of a maſter who went out at different hours to hire labourers, that God intended to call other labourers into the chriſtian church beſides them, at different periods of time, as their converſion could

could be effected—ſome earlier, and ſome later; and that he would afford thoſe nations, ſo converted, the ſame marks of favour which he afforded the Jews. This is the meaning and end of the parable; which is ſo far, you ſee, from giving encouragement to a late repentance, that it has not any immediate reference to repentance at all. It may indeed be applied to ſingle perſons; but can then only mean that God will accept the penitent, on his embracing the firſt means of conviction. But this doth not affect thoſe who, when called, never enter the vineyard; or, if they do enter it, inſtead of labouring as they ought till ſunſet, ſpend their time in idleneſs. Had the ſervants ſtood idle in the market-place after they had an opportunity of working, they had met with no reward—they had then been condemned as wicked and ſlothful ſervants; but, by labouring as ſoon as they could, they ſhewed they would have laboured ſooner if they had had it in their power. God therefore accepted the little they did, becauſe it was all they could do.

But it is your parts, my brethren, always to remember, that you, who are born in a chriſtian country, are called at an early hour. You need

not ſtand all the day idle, becauſe no man hath hired you: you were hired by baptiſm in your infancy, and have been called over and over by your heavenly Maſter. You have the ſcriptures in your hands, good books to read, well-diſpoſed chriſtians to converſe with, and conſtant opportunities of hearing God's word read and explained in churches. You are therefore without excuſe. In that laſt great day you would be thus anſwered: *That ſervant who knew his Lord's will, and did it not, ſhall be beaten with many ſtripes.*

As this, then, is a falſe idea of repentance, let us now ſee, as I propoſed, *ſecondly*, what kind of repentance alone is available in the ſight of God.

The end of repentance, we are repeatedly told, is to amend and purify our hearts and lives: it is the means of attaining that end; and unleſs that end be attained, there can be no repentance. We may therefore bemoan our ſins as much as we pleaſe—we may make the moſt ardent reſolutions againſt them; but if our tears and reſolutions have no effect on our hearts and lives, they have no value: there is yet no repentance. No point in the goſpel is more clearly

ſettled

ſettled than this: nor is there any point of human conduct in which miſtakes are more dangerous.

A father, we read in ſcripture, had two ſons, whom he ordered to work in his vineyard. The elder refuſed; but afterwards coming to himſelf, we are told, he *repented.* And what did he do when he repented? Did he expreſs his repentance by an idle ſorrow? Had he done that only, he had done nothing. But, we find, he immediately changed his heart and life; became a new man, and ſet earneſtly about what his father required. This *was* repentance. We may relapſe into ſin, and ſtill renew our repentance. God forbid that the door of ſalvation ſhould *ever* be ſhut againſt the real penitence of frail man! But if theſe relapſes are frequent, there can be no great ſincerity in our repentance.—The life of the beſt chriſtian, it is true, is only a conſtant ſtruggle with the frailties of his nature, and of courſe a continued repentance; but ſtill it ſhould be a life of conſtant reformation alſo: we ſhould be getting the better of ſome of the corruptions of our nature; and, on the whole, drawing nearer the great pattern of our imitation.

As to a late repentance, if you think it is at all prudent to make ſome proviſion for the next world before you take your leave of this, how is it poſſible not to ſee the danger of delay?—I ſpeak not of the danger which *hereafter* attends unrepented ſin; that is a dreadful conſequence indeed, of which, I hope, every one here is ſufficiently aware: but I ſpeak to thoſe who wiſh to repent, but have not the reſolution to ſet ſeriouſly about it.—Conſider, then, the danger that attends a late repentance: in the decline of life you may neither be *willing* nor *able* to repent. Conſider well the nature of habit: is there any thing you do which does not by practice become eaſier, and as it were more natural to you?—Have you not obſerved, in a hundred inſtances both in yourſelves and others, how your bad habits have increaſed? Every indulgence is a new rivet; every day makes the taſk of to-morrow more difficult, as every ſtroke of the mallet drives the wedge in more firmly than the firſt.

This increaſing nature of bad habits is ſurely a very ſtrong argument againſt a late repentance. When you have long lived a bad life—when your affections, and the whole turn of your mind is molded, as it were, in a worldly form, how

is

is it poſſible for you, at ſo late an hour, to recover yourſelves from ſuch inveterate habits, and become religious? The religious man and the worldly man have learned, if I may ſo ſpeak, quite oppoſite trades; and it requires as great an alteration to form one into the other, as it does to teach a man ſome particular buſineſs when he had been brought up in a very different one. It is not at once that a man can get habits of devotion—habits of reading the ſcriptures with reverence and attention; and habits of conſidering himſelf always in the preſence of Almighty God.—And, *in fact*, when we look into the world, how ſeldom is it that we ſee old inveterate ſinners make any change in their accuſtomed way of life! The better road appears ſo dark and obſtructed, that they turn from it with diſguſt. Moſt commonly, indeed, when people come to ſuch an age, their habits are fixed for life.——Surely this is a point deeply to be conſidered!

If it be dangerous to defer your repentance, becauſe you will moſt probably be indiſpoſed to repent in age; it is dangerous alſo, becauſe probably you may not only be *unwilling*, but *unable* alſo.

alſo. Diſeaſe may oppreſs you—your faculties may be gone—you may be ſuddenly called out of the world: all theſe are caſes which daily happen.

Let theſe things, then, have their proper weight. Conſider yourſelves as labourers hired into your maſter's vineyard. Labour honeſtly through the day, and look in the evening for your reward. The evening will ſoon cloſe in: whether you are rich, or whether you are poor, all will ſoon be reduced to one level. This world is not your home: it is a place only of ſhort abode. Whatever your poſſeſſions are—your enjoyments, your amuſements, your friends, your houſes, and every thing your hearts have moſt been ſet on, will all ſoon vaniſh.—What is to come in their room, it is your buſineſs to conſider—it is an awful thought. It behoves you ſurely to make ſome proviſion for this great change; and to fit yourſelves for the enjoyment of other things, ſince you are ſo ſoon to be diſpoſſeſſed of theſe; that when God calls you from your ſtation here, you may not be wholly unqualified for a better ſtation hereafter.

That

That we may all conſider what is our real buſineſs, and true intereſt, in this world, and not put it off till too late an hour, may God Almighty of his infinite goodneſs grant, through Jeſus Chriſt our Lord!

SERMON XII.

GAL. vi. 7.

WHATSOEVER A MAN SOWETH, THAT SHALL HE ALSO REAP: FOR HE THAT SOWETH TO HIS FLESH, SHALL OF THE FLESH REAP CORRUPTION; BUT HE THAT SOWETH TO THE SPIRIT, SHALL OF THE SPIRIT REAP LIFE EVERLASTING.

THE text may be thus in general explained;—In whatever way a man lives, he ſhall be treated in the ſame way by God Almighty. If he lead a wicked life, he ſhall feel the miſchief of it; and if he lead a pious one, he ſhall experience its advantages. And all this follows as naturally, as the grain you reap from the grain you ſow. Wheat or barley will not more ſurely produce its kindred ſeed, than goodneſs will produce happineſs, and wickedneſs miſery. The apoſtle

apoſtle does not appear to confine the obſervation either to this world or the next; but ſeems to take them both together, declaring, in general, that a man's happineſs, or miſery, ſhall on the whole depend upon his conduct in this preſent life.

Neither does the apoſtle mention the merits of Chriſt, as the ground of our ſalvation; taking it for granted, that this will eaſily be underſtood; and that he who ſoweth to the ſpirit can only, after his beſt endeavours, reap life everlaſting through Jeſus Chriſt.

Having thus explained the apoſtle's general meaning, I ſhall, in the following diſcourſe, *firſt*, endeavour to prove the truth of it; and ſhall, *ſecondly*, add a few obſervations, which ariſe from it.

Now in many caſes, even in this world, a man's reaping as he ſows is ſo plain, that we cannot avoid ſeeing it. The virtue and the reward—the ſin and the puniſhment, follow ſo cloſely upon each other, that the moſt careleſs obſerver cannot but acknowledge the connection. —Thus, when we obſerve a courſe of prudent actions crowned with ſucceſs, it is eaſy to ſee the

effect following the cauſe. Or, when we ſee a man ruin his fortune at a gaming-table, we need nobody to point out the ſource of the miſchief.

But, in many caſes, the good or the bad conſequence is not ſo eaſily traced. It may be ſome time before induſtry and frugality meet their deſerved ſucceſs; or the puniſhment may follow the offence ſo very ſlowly, that we may not diſcern the progreſs. When this is the caſe—when ſuffering does not immediately follow the tranſgreſſion, men are apt to run blindly on, without conſidering conſequences. Thus the man, who would not directly deſtroy himſelf by drinking poiſon, will without ſcruple indulge in continued acts of intemperance; notwithſtanding this vice will as generally bring on his ruin in the end, as if he had deſtroyed himſelf at once by poiſon. The only difference is, that in one caſe the miſchief works immediately; in the other, by degrees. But though a variety of circumſtances may for a while keep off the evil or the good, yet they are ſtill advancing with a ſteady pace, though perhaps too ſlow for common obſervation. Thus, for inſtance, a man may ſometimes live imprudently: he may never look into his affairs, nor compare his expences with his income;

come; yet, if his fortune be conſiderable, it may be ſome time before any great inconvenience may appear; and his neighbours, for a long time, may ſee no difficulties ariſe in his family. The miſchief, however, is inevitably drawing on: his income becomes ſcanty, debts increaſe, his creditors make demands, and, in the end, his imprudence becomes his ruin.

It would be eaſy to ſhew the particular miſchief that attends every other kind of vice.

With the ſame eaſe it might be ſhewn, how much the practice of every particular virtue is ſuited to make us happy, and how little ſuch happineſs is liable to be diſturbed.——When, therefore, we ſee the wicked man in proſperity—fortunate in his ſchemes, and bleſſed with every thing his ſoul can deſire—what then? To ſtop here, without making any farther inquiry, would be to ſtop too ſoon, and to form a judgment before we have all the circumſtances of the caſe. His proſperity may, all this while, be a deluſion; and the man may, in fact, be heaping up a ſlow-paced miſery to himſelf, inſtead of happineſs.—David was convinced of this great truth, and gives us a very expreſſive deſcription of it:—"I was grieved," ſays he, "at the wicked, I

"ſee

" ſee them in ſuch proſperity: for they are in
" no peril of death; but are luſty and ſtrong.
" They come in no misfortune, like other folk;
" neither are they plagued like other men. And
" this is the cauſe that they are ſo holden with
" pride and overwhelmed with cruelty. Lo!
" theſe are the ungodly—theſe proſper in the
" world, and theſe have riches in poſſeſſion.
" And I ſaid, then have *I* cleanſed my heart in
" vain, and waſhed my hands in innocency:
" yea, I had *almoſt* ſaid even as they.—Then
" thought I to underſtand this; but it was too
" hard for me, until I went into the ſanctuary
" of God: then underſtood I the end of theſe
" men. Namely, how thou doſt ſet them in
" ſlippery places, and caſteſt them down, and
" deſtroyeſt them. O! how ſuddenly do they
" conſume, periſh, and come to a fearful end?"

But though we may not always ſee that concluſion which David here ſaw, yet we may be aſſured that the truth is undoubted; and that either from circumſtances without, or diſtreſs within, wickedneſs will always, in ſome ſhape, meet its deſert. *What a man ſoweth, he ſhall certainly reap.*

Then

Then again, when we ſee good men ſuffering affliction in this world—oppreſſed with ſickneſs, or reduced to poverty—it is too haſty to conclude immediately, that goodneſs will not meet its reward. What we fooliſhly imagine to be misfortunes to good men, are many times the ſecret workings of Providence to draw good upon them—always ſpiritual, but often even temporal good. We have all perhaps, in more inſtances than one, obſerved that accidents, from which we feared great diſtreſs, have in the end been the means even of temporal advantage. When Joſeph, for inſtance, was taken from his father's houſe and ſold to the Iſhmalites, what a misfortune, it might be ſaid, have we here! and afterwards, when his virtue expoſed him to the calamities of a dungeon, what miſery, might people cry, had now befallen a poor, unhappy, though virtuous young man! And indeed, if we ſtop at this part of the hiſtory, we might be apt to exclaim, that in one inſtance, at leaſt, virtue had been the cauſe of miſery. But let us proceed a little farther, and we ſhall find that all theſe misfortunes were, in the hands of a gracious God, the ſteps—the natural and eaſy ſteps, by which Joſeph roſe to the higheſt of all earthly honours

—that of preſerving a whole people. "And "now (as he tells his brethren) be not angry "that ye ſold me hither, for God did ſend me "before you to preſerve life."——And though in every inſtance the whole proceeding of God Almighty may not be made out ſo plainly as it is in the caſe of Joſeph, yet we may be aſſured that in every inſtance God works in the ſame way; and that, if good men make a right uſe of their afflictions, they will always, in ſome way, find their happineſs in them.

Even ſuppoſe the good man ſhould not meet with his compenſation in this world, and the bad man ſhould carry his proſperity to the end of it, what then? Does this prove any thing in favour of wickedneſs? By no means, certainly. While we believe in a future ſtate, we muſt believe alſo, that as the period of our exiſtence is not yet complete, there is ample room hereafter to ſet all things right. During his paſſage through this world, the good man may have many faults which may want correction; and the bad man may have ſome virtues, which God may be pleaſed to reward. Hereafter, however, all things will be duly weighed, and adjuſted with great exactneſs; for the Almighty's plans with regard to

mankind

mankind begin indeed in this world, but are completed in the next.

LET us now ſee, as was propoſed *ſecondly*, what particular concluſions ariſe from what hath been ſaid.

In the firſt place, let us convince ourſelves of the folly of envying the *condition of others*; or, of being diſſatisfied *with our own*. Unleſs we knew all the circumſtances of every caſe, which we never can know, we may ſometimes envy what would prove a miſchief; and ſometimes deplore, what is in fact a bleſſing.

Again, though virtue and vice have a tendency to produce happineſs or miſery *in this world*, yet we ſee they ſometimes change this natural order, and vice laughs, while virtue is in tears. This ſhould teach us not to truſt our happineſs on theſe uncertain things; but to repoſe ourſelves on the hopes of a better life, where our virtue is ſure of reward, whatever meaſure it meets with here.

Thirdly, the events of this world ſhew us, that it could never have been meant for a place either of full reward, or of complete puniſhment. This ſuggeſtion, therefore, greatly ſtrengthens the ar-

gument for a future ſtate. If a juſt God preſide over the affairs of this world, we cannot but ſuppoſe he muſt either here or hereafter bring things to a balance.

Laſtly, we ought to lay it down as a certain rule, from which we ought never to depart, that nothing can be our real *intereſt*, but what is alſo our *duty;* and that our duty always *is* our real intereſt. We ſhould therefore fix in our minds a firm perſuaſion—a ſteady reſolution, never to yield to any ſolicitations of pleaſure, or intereſt, that may draw us aſide from our duty; nor be affrighted from it by any difficulties with which the world may threaten us. Our duty ſhould always be the great pole-ſtar to direct us: we ſhould have it always in our eye: the current may drive us, or the ſtorm may force us from our courſe; but ſtill we ſhould endeavour to recover it, and never be at reſt till it appear again in ſight.—The religious man may ſurely turn every event to his ſpiritual advantage. As all nature is at God's diſpoſal, we may reſt ſatisfied that He, who ſuffereth not a ſparrow to fall to the ground without his knowledge, will not ſuffer his faithful ſervants to be afflicted beyond what is proper for them.——Let us then to the laſt hold

hold faſt our integrity, and not be weary of well-doing; aſſuring ourſelves, that nothing is more true than the doctrine of the text;—that *what a man ſoweth, that he ſhall alſo reap: for he that ſoweth to his fleſh, ſhall of the fleſh reap corruption; but he that ſoweth to the ſpirit, ſhall of the ſpirit reap life everlaſting.*

SERMON XIII.

EPH. V. 16.

REDEEMING * THE TIME, BECAUSE THE DAYS ARE EVIL.

THIS paſſage occurs twice in ſcripture. In the epiſtle to the Coloſſians, it appears rather as a prudential caution. It is introduced with theſe words: *Walking with wiſdom towards them that are without* †.—But in the paſſage before us, I

* The ſame word, ἐξαγοραζω, is made uſe of in *purchaſing a commodity*, and in *redeeming the world* by Chriſt. This laxneſs, I ſhould think, might bring ſome little difficulty on the doctrine of the redemption, if it were not ſecured by various other modes of expreſſing the ſame idea; ſuch as, Epheſ. i. 14.—1 Theſſ. v. 10.—1 Tim. i. 15.—1 Tim. ii. 6. —2 Tim. ii. 10.—Titus, ii. 14.—Heb. i. 3.—xi. 14, 17.—Heb. iv. 16.—v. 9.—vii. 25 & 27.—Heb. ix. 12, 28, &c.

† Coloſſ. iv. 5.

ſee

ſee nothing that has any reference to worldly matters; but much that has reference to ſpiritual. At leaſt, the words ſeem capable of a much higher, a more general, and a more inſtructive interpretation, than a prudential one. I mean, therefore, to conſider them in this enlarged ſenſe; and to take occaſion from them to preſs upon you, *firſt*, the neceſſity of a religious improvement of your time; and, *ſecondly*, to explain the reaſon given for it—*becauſe the days are evil.*

I. To *redeem* a thing, is to take it out of a ſtate of bondage and reſtraint, and to place it again in its proper ſituation; generally paying ſome conſideration as the price of redemption. Thus we redeem a man from priſon by paying his debts; and thus our bleſſed Saviour redeemed us by dying for our ſins.

To *redeem our time*, therefore, is to reſtore it from ſome abuſe into its proper channel; paying, as the price of its redemption, our ſorrow for what is paſt. Or, in other words, to redeem our time conſiſts in correcting the abuſes of it; and in ſpending it, for the future, in a rational and religious manner.

That we may be enabled to ſpend the future in a proper manner, it behoves us to examine, in what way we have ſpent the paſt. Year after year paſſes over us. Many of us have ſeen a great number of theſe portions of time fleet away, which muſt, on the whole, either have been redeemed, or muſt now be a heavy burden upon us.

That we may the better aſcertain the uſe we have made of our *paſt* time, once in our own power, let us conſider it in three points of light: as having been *well employed*—or *ill employed*—or miſpent, in a ſort of *trifling way*, between both.

That part of our time which hath been *well employed*—which, amidſt the buſineſs of this world, and an honeſt attention to our calling, hath been dedicated to God by piety and devotion—by acts of kindneſs to man—by conquering our bad habits, and forming in ourſelves good diſpoſitions—by inſtructing our families, and breeding them up in the fear of God; ſtands in little need, we hope, of being redeemed. We preſume there is nothing here, but ſuch infirmities as will be pardoned through the merits of Chriſt.

I ſhall

I ſhall proceed, therefore, to that part of our time which hath been *ill employed:* I mean that part of it which hath been *ſpent wickedly.*

This is indeed the grand point, about which our queſtion chiefly proceeds; and about which we ought therefore to be chiefly ſolicitous. That part of it which hath been *well employed*, will take care of itſelf. The leſs we think of *it*, the better. Our heavenly Father hath marked *it* in *his* book. *We* have done with it, till that day when our great accounts ſhall be ſettled.—But the time we have *ſpent wickedly* deſerves our cloſeſt attention. Wickedneſs is the diſeaſe of nature: it is conſtitutional, and therefore ſhould be the more watched. Our bodies and ſouls are equally ſubject to diſeaſe; and if the cauſes be not checked which produce theſe diſeaſes, they will infallibly end in death. We generally, however, do our utmoſt to ward off the death of the body; while the death of the ſoul, which is infinitely more dreadful, is little heeded. And yet remedies for the diſeaſes of the ſoul are much more certain in their effect than thoſe of the body. Gout, fever, and conſumption, often elude the ſkill of the phyſician: but, under the phyſician of ſouls, you never miſcarry, if you take

his

his preſcription. He who can recollect the ſins of his paſt life, that he may redeem them—that he may buy off the guilt that attends them by repentance—by an amendment of heart and life, and truſt in the atonement of a bleſſed Redeemer, will blot them out of God's book: like a debt paid, they will appear no more againſt him. But if he will not take theſe ſteps, we muſt leave him, till God Almighty, in his mercy, perhaps by ſome awakening judgment, may lead him to reflection.

I mean not, however, to affirm, that unleſs the ſinner remembers every particular bad action of his life, that bad action will appear againſt him. He may be ſincerely deſirous of repenting; and yet, if he have been a great ſinner, he may not be able to recollect many of his ſins. In that caſe, if he redeem his wicked life in general—that is, if he leave off his ſins, and change his heart as well as his life, thoſe ſins, though he cannot remember them, it may be hoped will be blotted out.—He hath, however, a much better chance of redeeming his ill-ſpent time by calling himſelf frequently to account, and by examining the value of each day as it paſſes on.

We come now to that part of our time, which hath neither been well nor ill employed, but has been ſpent in a manner between both. Now it muſt neceſſarily be, that while we live in this world—while we have theſe frail bodies to attend, a great part of our time muſt be ſpent in this ſort of indifferent manner. We muſt have time for eating and ſleeping, and proper amuſement: and, ſo far as theſe are neceſſary, ſo far we are not accountable. But time, ſpent in amuſement, ſteals away on the ſofteſt wings: if it be not narrowly watched, it will ſoon glide into idle and miſpent time. We are to give an account, we read, of our *idle words*—equally, at leaſt, may we ſuppoſe, an account muſt be given of our idle time.

Now we all have, more or fewer, idle time to anſwer for. But ſuch of you as labour for your daily bread, if you be induſtrious in your callings, cannot indeed have much idle time upon your hands. The great guilt of ſpending idle time, belongs chiefly to thoſe to whom God hath given the moſt time; among them, indeed, we often ſee a ſhocking waſte of it.

Now, the circumſtances of people differ ſo much, that no preciſe rule can be given to direct all,

all. And, no doubt, a gracious God will be merciful to thoſe who mean well in the general employment of their time, though they may often be miſtaken, and ſpend too much of it in an improper way. But there are numbers whoſe conduct, in this reſpect, is ſo very far from what it ought to be; running continually from one idle amuſement to another—their thoughts taken up with nothing elſe—that their conſciences muſt be very eaſy indeed, if they quietly ſuffer ſuch abuſe. When amuſements are thus made (as numbers make them) the great end of life, no doubt ſuch a life, though not ſtained with open ſin, is a very guilty one. It allows room neither for the duties of religion, nor the obligations of ſociety, nor the offices of domeſtic life: it conſumes both *time*, and the means of doing good with it: all gives way to pleaſure, and ſelf-enjoyment; and there is little left of the man, but what belongs equally to the brute.

Let ſuch vile examples be a warning to all; but to young people eſpecially, who cannot have too ſtrict a guard on themſelves. It is inconceivable, how ſoon theſe pleaſurable ideas get poſſeſſion of them—fill up all their thoughts—and, becoming the chief buſineſs and ſerious

employment of their lives, form them by degrees into diſſipated, uſeleſs, and contemptible characters.

II. I PROCEED now to the *ſecond* head of my diſcourſe; which was, to ſhew you how neceſſary it is to *redeem*, or to improve, our time, on the conſideration, as the apoſtle ſuggeſts, *that the days are evil.*

We have occaſion for all our watchfulneſs and care in a world, where almoſt every thing has a tendency to purloin our time.

If we look into ourſelves, we find our time too much lifted under the command of paſſions and appetites, which have a continual tendency to lead us into ſin. In what a moment are we inflamed by malice, luſt, envy, a love of pleaſure, and other bad inclinations! Some wicked paſſion will ever, without great care, be leading us aſtray. We find even our beſt actions, I mean ſuch as appear to the world our beſt actions, ſpring ſo often from bad motives, and involved ſo often with bad paſſions, that we are aſhamed of the time we may have often ſpent upon them.

If,

If, from looking within ourſelves, we look around us, we find our time equally expoſed to temptation among our fellow-creatures. What wickedneſs is there to which we are not, directly or indirectly, tempted by each other? Innocent time is rarely to be found in ſociety—ſuch intercourſe generally gives it guilt. Where can we throw our eyes, without ſeeing vice in ſome ſhape practiſed? If men lived like chriſtians, as we are told they once did, their very example would encourage each other in piety. It would be diſreputable to prophane the name of God—to break the Sabbath—to be drunk, or guilty of a fraud. But now all the force of example leans the other way; and it becomes a duty, in general, rather to avoid than imitate.

Every ſtation of life, likewiſe, ſhews us that *the days are evil.* Every profeſſion brings with it its particular temptation; and no man, whether he live in the world or ſhut himſelf from it, can hope to eſcape them.

Are you rich? Riches involve you in a thouſand temptations to wickedneſs. They hold up to you the pleaſures and vanities of life; they encourage you in pride, and indolence, and diſſipation;

ſipation; and muſt all be paid for by a tax on our time. They have a tendency alſo to make you forget God, and love the world. The heart grows hardened, and unfeeling to the wants of others.

Are you poor? Murmuring, and repining, and envy, and diſhoneſty, are often the vices of the cottage; and low pleaſures, and drinking, and ſwearing, and ſabbath-breaking, and obſcenity, and ſpite, and malice, and miſchief-making, and ſcurrilous abuſe, and ill-neighbourhood.—Vices of all kinds are found in all ſtations; we have all time enough to employ upon them: but I mention thoſe which are the moſt common temptations of each.

Even health and ſtrength, inſtead of being vigorous ſupports of uſeful time, as they ought to be, are apt to lead us into exceſs and miſchief. How often do they raiſe temptations in our way, and encourage us to try the ſtrength of our conſtitutions in feats of wickedneſs?

On the other hand, ſickneſs tempts us to ſee all things in a gloomy light—to envy thoſe who are enjoying the world in more happineſs; and regretting that we are ſo ſoon to leave it.

Every

Every *ſeaſon* of life, likewiſe, hath its peculiar temptations to conſume our time, and teach us that *the days are evil.* Youth is tempted by diſſipation and pleaſure: it is thoughtleſs of death, and careleſs of eternity. While maturer age inclines us often to avarice, and ambition, and diſtruſt, and jealouſy; and to a greater love of the world, perhaps, the nearer we come to the cloſe of it.

Thus God has thought proper to place us in a ſtate of trial, and among temptations of every kind, that he may train us up, by conquering them, to learn the true uſe of time.

Since then the *days are evil*—ſince we live among ſo many things that incline us to wickedneſs, let us endeavour continually, as the apoſtle adviſes, to *redeem our time;* to correct our days and years, each portion of our time as it paſſes, by the miſtakes of what *is paſt.*

Do you ever conſider what your time is? Does it ever come into your thoughts, that your time is the opportunity which God gives you of working out your ſalvation?—that on it all your hopes of everlaſting happineſs, through the merits of

of Chriſt, depend? It is with *time* that we purchaſe *eternity*.

The worldly man wants no perſuaſion to engage him to loſe no time in the purſuit of wealth; nor the ambitious man, to catch at every opportunity of advancing himſelf to honour: and the man of pleaſure's great maxim is, Let us make the moſt of time, for it is ſhort; *let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die.* And ſhall the grand purpoſe of all, for which time is given us, be hardly ever conſidered? Shall we make every uſe of time, except that alone for which it was chiefly intended?

If we could command time, there would be ſomething, at leaſt, *like* common ſenſe in ſuch behaviour. If we even knew the length of our lives, we might have *ſome* excuſe for putting off the moſt important buſineſs of them a little later. But when we cannot ſee an hour before us, it is a wonderful thing that we are not ſtartled by ſuch a thought into more ſerioufneſs.

What ſecurity has even he, who bids faireſt for life—who is in full health, and youth, and vigour; when he looks around him, and ſees what numbers, in his own circumſtances, are continually dropping into their graves with little

or no warning? can he avoid conſidering that this may be his own caſe? and that, if it ſhould, he muſt enter immediately on an unalterable ſtate, for which, if he hath made no proviſion, the neglect can never be repaired—his chance is over—there is no more redemption of time.

But, if we call the improvidence of youth to ſuch attention, what ſhall we ſay to thoſe who are advanced in years? To ſee the hoary head—to ſee age, with all its infirmities, ſquandering away in the ſervice of the world the ſhort remnant of a decrepid life—dead to the paſt, waſting the preſent, and hardened to the future—is a ſight above meaſure ſhocking and aſtoniſhing. Infirm in body, and decayed in mind, how ſhall we then ſet about the great duty of *redeeming our time?* How can we ſuppoſe that God will receive our defective ſervices, without any proof of our ſincerity? How can we hope he will accept our ſacrifice, when we have nothing to offer but the dregs and refuſe of an abandoned life?

In a word, the great value of our time depends on its connection with our ſouls. So that, you ſee, the queſtion is not ſo much, whether we are to *redeem our time?* as, whether we wiſh

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to ſave our ſouls? The ſaving of our ſouls depends entirely upon the ſpending of our time; for the merits of a Saviour will never redeem thoſe who take no ſteps to redeem themſelves.—If we are wiſe we ſhall conſider this great queſtion as we ought; and may God Almighty aſſiſt us with his gracious aid, in providing ſuch an anſwer to it, as will prepare us for that awful account which we muſt all give, when time ſhall be no more!

SERMON XIV.

PHIL. iii. 13.

BRETHREN, I COUNT NOT MYSELF TO HAVE APPREHENDED; BUT THIS ONE THING I DO: FORGETTING THE THINGS WHICH ARE BEHIND, AND REACHING FORTH UNTO THOSE THINGS WHICH ARE BEFORE, I PRESS TOWARDS THE MARK.

IN the following diſcourſe, I ſhall, *firſt*, endeavour to explain the text; and ſhall, *ſecondly*, apply it.

The words will bear this general interpretation:—Brethren, I do not conſider myſelf as having yet attained the higheſt degree of chriſtian perfection. That is a height, towards which we may be continually advancing, and yet can never fully attain. It is the part of every good chriſtian, however, to aim at it, as nearly as he can.

can. He ought never to be at reſt; but, leaving behind him his paſt attainments, he ſhould preſs, like a racer, to the ground before him. All his attention ſhould be laid out in adding to his virtues—in improving thoſe he has—in weaning himſelf from the world—in becoming daily more heavenly-minded, and in advancing ſtill nearer perfection.

This ſeems to be the *general ſenſe* of the text: let us now examine it more cloſely.

The firſt thing the apoſtle enjoins, is to *forget the things which are behind.* What *things* he ſays not; but leaves us to collect his meaning, and common ſenſe will eaſily explain it. He cannot mean our ſins: theſe, it is true, may be called *things behind*, or things paſt; but common ſenſe aſſures us, theſe are things we ſhould never forget, but always remember; bewailing and lamenting them; praying for God's grace; and hoping for his goodneſs, through Chriſt, to pardon them. We may take it for granted, therefore, that what the apoſtle bids us forget, is ſomething which is better forgotten than remembered. What that is, requires little *ſtudy* to recollect, but ſome *candour* to apply. Let us take

are inclined to acknowledge: before a higher tribunal, we may be aſſured, his ſelf-exaltation would bring him to ſhame. We are expreſsly told, that every one *who exalteth himſelf, ſhall be humbled:* and we have it on record, how it fared with the boaſting Phariſee.

WELL, therefore, may the apoſtle adviſe us, in the ſecond place, after *forgetting the things that are behind*, to *reach forth unto the things that are before*. We ſhould never think ourſelves ſo good as we may be, nor to have done ſo much good as we may do; but ſtill to be endeavouring to proceed, in the ſcripture language, *from ſtrength to ſtrength*.

There are certain principles, which we muſt firſt learn in every thing. From theſe we advance higher; and whoever ſtops, either at the principles, or in the progreſs, will never make any proficiency. Whatever we purſue in earneſt, we keep the point of perfection always in view. If a man wiſhes to be learned, for inſtance, and wiſhes it from his heart, all the acquirements he makes are nothing: time is too ſhort for him; he keeps preſſing on; adding knowledge to knowledge; reading book after book; correcting

ing his opinions as he proceeds; and is never at reſt, becauſe there is always ſomething more to be known. Again, whoever engages in any art, or trade, if he be in earneſt, whatever his point is, he purſues it ſteadily; whether it be to underſtand thoroughly the art he profeſſes, or it be the vanity of being at the head of his profeſſion, or it be to procure wealth; ſtill, if he be in earneſt, he keeps advancing; never reſting on the proficiency he *has* made, nor on the eminence he *has* gained, nor on the fortune he *has* acquired; but ſtill endeavours to attain and acquire more.

Now the apoſtle's meaning is exactly this. We ſhould proceed in the affairs of religion, as we do in the affairs of the world; and there is no doubt but we *ſhould*, if we were as much in earneſt. And this is ſo much a truth, that if a man do not proceed in this way, he may be aſſured he is not in earneſt: there is ſome ſecret ſin with which he is in league at the bottom: he is alive to the world, and its pleaſures; but dead to religion, and its joys. His faith, if he have any, is dead: it is not ſtrong enough to lead him on. *A little leaven*, ſaith our Saviour, *quickeneth the whole lump*—if it be the true leaven.

leaven. His is not: it does not quicken. The lump remaineth.

But what! you cry, muſt the chriſtian never faulter in his pace? Is he ſuppoſed to proceed with *one uniform progreſs?* Does he miſs of his ſalvation, if he now and then make a wry ſtep? God forbid! We need not ſcripture authority to convince us, that in many things we all offend. But does it follow, becauſe we ſin, that we ſhould *reſt* in ſin?—that becauſe nature is frail, and we are too apt to fall into ſins of ſurprize and infirmity, we ſhould for that reaſon ſin with our eyes open? There will be lukewarmneſs—there will be coldneſs—there will be ſins, not only of omiſſion, but of commiſſion likewiſe, even among good chriſtians. But the difference lies here:—The good chriſtian continually bewails the ſinfulneſs of his nature, and laments his own particular ſins: he ſtrives to get the better of them; and in this honeſt, ſincere ſtrife with himſelf, and the corruptions of his nature, conſiſts what the apoſtle calls, *reaching forth unto the things that are before.*

This expreſſion, you ſee, does not place the mark, at which a chriſtian ſhould aim, in ſo exalted a light, that he need deſpair, if he do not entirely

entirely reach it. He is not told that he muſt gain the mark, or expect damnation: he is told only, that he muſt *reach forth towards it*—he muſt ſincerely endeavour to attain it. The mark is manifeſtly beyond his attainment. He is ordered *to be perfect, as his Father in heaven is perfect*. This is a mark which he cannot poſſibly attain. But, if he be a real chriſtian, he will not eaſily be ſatisfied with himſelf. Though he cannot attain the mark, he muſt ſtrive to attain it, and to get as near it as he can. If the mark be high, the more ſtrenuous ſhould be his endeavours to reach it.

AND now, my brethren, by way of applying the above conſiderations to ourſelves, what ſay you to theſe things?—what ſay your conſciences to them? Give them a fair hearing. Aſk them plainly (cloſe queſtioning will produce honeſt anſwers) whether you make any ſteady endeavour to *preſs towards the mark;* and be not deceived in a matter of ſuch conſequence. It is not *talking* like chriſtians, and having Chriſt always in your mouths, that is the mark. It is not reading your bibles, that is the mark. It

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is not frequenting the houſe of God, that is the mark. It is not being of this or that ſect of religion, that is the mark: there are, no doubt, good men in all perſuaſions. It is not receiving the ſacrament, or giving alms, or any other external action, that is the mark. But it is a holy diſpoſition—a lively faith in God, through Chriſt, which produces an innocent, conſcientious, and godly life. This is the mark which you are to aim at. You are ordered, you know, to let your *light ſhine before men.* Why, think you?—that they may hear you talk about religion?—that they may ſee you lift up your hands and eyes to heaven? No, ſurely; but that they may ſee your *good works*, and *glorify*—whom?—not you, but the *Father which is in heaven.*—You yourſelves, you know, are to make no account of your good works; but to forget them, as you are taught, among *the things that are behind.* You may depend upon it, whenever you make account of them yourſelves, they are good works no longer. It was only for the ſinleſs Saviour of the world to ſay, *Learn of me.*

Forgetting, therefore, the things which are behind, let us be continually *reaching towards thoſe that are*

are before; and adding daily to what little goodneſs we may poſſeſs. Many of you, my brethren, may be very well ſatisfied with yourſelves, if you do not break the commandments, and are not guilty of any great ſins: but you muſt not think you are therefore good chriſtians. You muſt not think it *enough*, for inſtance, to leave off ſwearing, or drinking, or any other bad habit. So far it is well; but it is only ſo far. A man that neither ſwears nor drinks is not ſurely, for that reaſon, a good chriſtian. By leaving off theſe vices he has gained one ſtep; but if he do not proceed farther, he has made but a little advance. What matters it, though you leave off ſwearing, if you have ſtill no more reverence for the name of God in your hearts than you had before; but ſtill do a thouſand things, without any fear of giving him offence?—And thus with regard to all other ſins. You muſt not ſay, when you leave them off, This is all that is required of me; but, God give me grace to proceed!

To Him let us all pray for aſſiſtance, that he may enable us to *run the race that is ſet before us*, and preſs towards the mark; not truſting in our

our own ſtrength, but in his aſſiſtance. And may God Almighty grant, that every ſinner amongſt us, however ſlender his beginning, may grow in grace; and, *forgetting thoſe things which are behind, may reach forth unto the things that are before, through Jeſus Chriſt our Lord.*

SERMON XV.

JOHN, i. 51.

HEREAFTER YE SHALL SEE HEAVEN OPENED.

THIS was our bleſſed Saviour's encouragement to a new convert. But it is equally an encouragement to all his faithful diſciples. After a toilſome pilgrimage through this world, what a comfort ſhould it be to us all, to ſee *heaven opening at the end.*

Let us then, my brethren, employ our thoughts at preſent a little on this ſubject. Let us conſider, *firſt*, the happineſs of heaven; and, *ſecondly*, the effect which ſuch thoughts ſhould have upon us.

I. THE world we inhabit, is a brave world, no doubt. We admire its grand and beautiful furniture—plains, mountains, woods, rivers, lakes,

lakes, and ſeas—all filled and enlivened with animals of different kinds. We admire the *variety* of all theſe wonderful modes of creation. We admire the exquiſite *contrivance*, by which the ſeveral parts are connected together, and formed into ſo wonderful a whole.—All this gorgeous array is certainly a juſt foundation for expecting a future world will be ſtill more grand and beautiful. *If God ſo clothe the graſs of the field*—if God has made this world ſo beautiful, may we not reaſon the probability of his making heaven more beautiful? If he hath provided ſuch a habitation for our bodies, what may we not expect for our ſouls?—But this world is not only a grand and beautiful ſcene in itſelf; it furniſhes alſo a great degree of happineſs to thoſe who extend not their expectations from it beyond the limits of religion. Thus it leads us up, as by a ſtep, to the great Creator, of whoſe inclination as well as power to make us happy it gives ſufficient proof.

But notwithſtanding this world is ſo beautifully and happily furniſhed, it has by no means thoſe complete marks of happineſs, which we are given to hope for in a future ſtate. As an *habitation*, it is ſubject to various evils—ſtorms,

earthquakes, inundations, inclement ſeaſons, noxious animals, and diſeaſes of innumerable kinds: all theſe evils are the neceſſary appendages to a ſtate of trial. But the chief deſtroyers of human happineſs are mankind themſelves. Our inward happineſs is continually invaded by our own bad paſſions and follies; while our outward happineſs is equally preyed on by the knavery and violence of others. The joys of heaven, in the mean time, are pure, and unmixed with any thing that can diſturb our peace.

But the pleaſurable enjoyments of this world are not only mixed with evil—they are unſatisfying alſo: every thing troubles us, while few things ſatisfy us. However it be, either we, or the things of this world, though made for each other, are ſo diſagreeing in their nature—ſo whimſical in our connections, that we can live pleaſantly neither with them nor without them. Thus, in fact, the ſons of this world purſue their own happineſs, as a fool purſues his ſhadow: he endeavours to catch it, but it is continually advancing before him, never to be caught. They who have led a life of ambition, gain, or pleaſure, can tell us if they pleaſed, that the upſhot of all is ſatiety and mortification.

But if we poſſeſſed the higheſt degree of worldly enjoyment, ſtill we muſt want one degree of happineſs more—the ſecurity of what we enjoy. But the happineſs of heaven is like the great Creator himſelf, with whom is *no variableneſs, neither ſhadow of turning.* And though this is but a circumſtance, and does not make the happineſs of heaven in itſelf either more or leſs; yet it is ſuch a circumſtance, that no degree of happineſs could be perfect without it. Let the world make us the largeſt promiſes that wealth, power, and pleaſure united could beſtow, what avail its gifts, if they cannot one moment be ſecured to us? But the happineſs of heaven, we know, as it is *an exceeding, ſo it is an eternal weight of glory.*

Thus, then, in obtaining ideas of the happineſs of heaven, we have recourſe to the analogy of this world. "Heaven is my throne," ſays God, "and earth is my footſtool." The latter leads to the former. Whatever is beautiful, grand, or productive of happineſs in this world, will be infinitely improved in beauty, grandeur, and happineſs in the next; while, on the other hand, whatever is deformed, miſerable, and wretched, in this world, will be removed in the next.—

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This ſeems to be the immediate interpretation of many parts of ſcripture in which heaven is alluded to, though immediately held out in none.

I SHALL now conſider, *ſecondly*, the effect which the thoughts of heaven ought to have upon us.

The firſt ſentiment which ſhould ariſe in our minds from the thoughts of heaven, is that of gratitude to God for giving us ſo glorious a reward for our poor ſervices; and not only for giving it, but for propoſing it to us. He might have beſtowed eternal happineſs upon thoſe whom he thought deſerving it, without mentioning it; but it is ſurely a great encouragement to hold it out. In conſequence of this goodneſs, we ought continually to exerciſe our faith by holy meditation and prayer.

The next great effect which the thoughts of heaven ought to have upon us, is to leſſen our concern for the things of this world. God ſeems on purpoſe to have made this life a ſcene of ſorrow, in many inſtances, that we may have no ſufficient temptation to take our views from the next—that heaven may have no rival on earth—that there might be nothing in this world that can pretend to our affection, or court us with

any advantage in compariſon of everlaſting life. When we come to die, and eternity, opening before us, ſhall force itſelf upon our ſerious thoughts, things will appear in a different light. The buſineſs, amuſements, and pleaſures of life, now throw a miſt before our eyes: we ſee things otherwiſe than they really are—we ſee them through our prejudices. In a dying hour theſe prejudices will be removed: we ſhall then ſee things in a true light. What we now moſt value, will then appear moſt trifling; and what we now ſo much neglect, will then appear of infinite concern.—Now, if we could only bring ourſelves to conſider things in this light, while the opportunity of life and health are before us, we might be convinced, at a much cheaper rate than we commonly are, of the great wiſdom—if there is any great wiſdom—of being wiſe for eternity; and be convinced of the vanity of this world, before we deſpaired of the happineſs of the next. What is it to a dying man, that he poſſeſſes ſo much land, or ſo much money? And are we not all dying men? Do we not all live under a ſentence of death? The only difference is, that one man may be ſo many days in dying, and another, as many years.

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The next great effect, which the conſideration of a future ſtate of happineſs ought to have upon us, is, to make us as ſolicitous as we can in preparing ourſelves for it. Let us remember, that whether we deliberately attend to it or not, we are haſtening apace to another world. Our thoughtleſſneſs does not ſtop the progreſs of our lives. Time haſtens on. What our ſpan is, we know not: but this we know, that our everlaſting happineſs now lies at ſtake. Whether we will or not, our ſouls muſt be immortal: they muſt live for ever, either in a ſtate of happineſs, or of miſery. We may chuſe which we will; but in one, the ſcriptures aſſure us, we muſt live.—And is this, think you, one of thoſe nice queſtions, about which we ſhould deliberate? Are we to weigh and conſider it, as a matter of doubt, whether we ſhould wiſh to be happy or miſerable to all eternity? Can we conſider what eternity is, and make no preparation for it? Can we toil for the ſake of a trifling ſubſiſtence in this life, and yet think no proviſion neceſſary for a life which is to laſt for ever? What do we toil for? A life, which is a mere flower, cut down as ſoon as it ſprings.—What do we admire? A ſpark, which is extinguiſhed as ſoon as ſtruck.—

He who gathers ſtraws, when he ſhould be intent on a journey of the greateſt concern, is even wiſe in compariſon of him, who plays and trifles through this world in his road to eternity.—Let us then rouze ourſelves with thoughts ſo affecting. Let us merely conſider, with attention, what *eternity* is; and then ſee the force of our Saviour's queſtion—*What is a man profited, if he ſhould gain the whole world, and loſe his own ſoul?*

Again, the conſideration of a future life ought to leſſen the evils of this. Theſe evils will affect us more or leſs, as our minds are ſtrengthened with conſiderations proper to ſupport us under them. If our minds are ſeriouſly impreſſed with the thoughts of religion, they will be leſs ſunk with ſickneſs, or poverty, or whatever affliction God may be pleaſed to lay upon us. The idea that *God* lays this burden upon us—that, if we bear it with pious reſignation, it is religion, and that it is ſtill procuring us more the favour of our Almighty Father—cannot but make us more reſigned to the difficulties we meet with. We know we are only *ſtrangers and pilgrims on earth*, travelling to our great home; and muſt take things as we find them, and not expect to have every thing here as we could wiſh. The trouble we

we have gone through, will make us ſtill happier when we arrive at our Father's houſe. On that let us fix our eyes with pious hope; and enjoy, as it were, that happineſs before-hand, which, we may aſſure ourſelves, will be as real, as our miſery was on earth. With holy Stephen, let us ſee *heaven open, and Jeſus ſitting at the right hand of God.*

The laſt effect I ſhall mention, which the thoughts of heaven may have upon us, is, to conſider them as an antidote to the fears of death. To a good man, death and heaven are cloſely united. From the former you ſtep into the latter: and he who thus looks upon death as a door to a happy eternity, may welcome it as a meſſenger of the beſt news he ever heard; and no one can ſtay behind in this world, with half the comfort that ſuch a man leaves it.—This indeed is a great height of chriſtian fortitude. But we all have it in our power thus to meet death, and diſarm it of all its terrors: and numbers, we know, have actually done ſo.

THUS I have conſidered the ſeveral points I propoſed. Let us all, my brethren, conſider

them frequently; for nothing is more true, than that *where our treaſure is, there will our hearts be alſo.* He who never thinks of heaven, can certainly have no treaſure there.—But that treaſure, you ſay, is at a diſtance. It may be ſo; but is it therefore leſs real? We put our money out to uſe, and think it as much our own as if we had it in our pockets: and ſurely the word of God is as good ſecurity as any earthly bond. Perhaps, indeed, you are careleſs about a treaſure in heaven, and do not wiſh to be at the pains of laying it up. To this, indeed, we have nothing farther to ſay: you muſt hoard up what you think a better *treaſure.*—But if the diſtance of the recompence be the only thing which moves you, go to your neighbour, aſk him why he buries his ſeed in the ground? He will tell you, he expects a joyful harveſt. If your faith be as ſtrong, you may be as ſecure in the thought of being yourſelf buried in the ground, as you are of burying your ſeed. God promiſes to raiſe *you;* and he has given you a proof of his power by raiſing *your ſeed.*—Search your hearts, then—cleanſe them from ſin—truſt in the mercies of God through the merits of Chriſt; and

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be assured, that when the great day arrives, it will find you ready to stand before your Judge, and ready to give account of your works, full of the joyful hope of seeing *heaven opened*, and God's gracious promises of everlasting life fulfilled.

NINE

SERMONS,

ON

ST. MATTHEW'S GOSPEL.

THE following Sermons are preſented to the Public, merely as a ſpecimen of a mode of preaching, which I think may be uſeful to a country congregation. The Scriptures will be read with more pleaſure, the more each little difficulty, which now and then ſtops an unlearned reader, is removed.

This mode of preaching might be carried ſtill farther. The Sunday Leſſons, from the Old Teſtament, are not all, perhaps, ſelected with equal judgment. Many of them contain difficulties, which want explanation. If theſe Leſſons, as they occur, were now and then explained in the following Sermon, it might have its uſe among the common people.

SERMON XVI.

JOHN, v. 39.

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES; FOR IN THEM YE THINK YE HAVE ETERNAL LIFE.

THE ſcriptures which our Saviour here inſtructs us to ſearch, were the ſcriptures of the Old Teſtament; for the New Teſtament, you know, was not then written. The inſtruction, however, applies equally to both.

You are here, then, ordered to *ſearch*, or to examine carefully the ſcriptures; and the reaſon given is, that they contain the knowledge of eternal life, and the terms of obtaining it. The ſcriptures alone open to us the knowledge of theſe great truths. The heathen had an obſcure idea of immortality: it is an idea, in a degree perhaps, natural to us all; but it was revelation alone, as given us in the ſcripture, which opened a life of immortality diſtinctly to us.

Nor do the ſcriptures only convey to us the *knowledge* of everlaſting life; which had been little, if they had not ſhewn us alſo, the means of obtaining it. The heathen had no notion of the pardon of ſin, nor of the miſchief which attended it: and God, no doubt, will exact from them only in proportion to their knowledge. But to us, the ſcriptures are clear on theſe great heads: they ſhew us our loſt condition—our natural unworthineſs;—and point out to us the only means of our reſtoration, through the atonement of Jeſus Chriſt.

The advantages therefore ariſing from *ſearching* the ſcriptures, are equal to any pains you can beſtow upon it. I cannot exhort you too earneſtly to employ a conſtant part of your leiſure in this uſeful exerciſe. Many of you are much engaged, and muſt neceſſarily be ſo, in your worldly affairs; but ſtill every one of you may employ ſome little leiſure, if you chuſe it, in reading his Teſtament; and all of you may attend reverently to it, when you hear it read at church.

That I may contribute as much as I can to make the ſtudy of the ſcriptures more uſeful and agreeable to you, I propoſe to go through a

ſhort

ſhort explication of the more difficult parts of the goſpel by St. Matthew; and ſhall endeavour to make you more eaſily underſtand them. I propoſe to begin my explanation next Sunday. To-day, as an introduction to it, I ſhall call your attention to a few rules, which may contribute, I hope, to make you read the ſcriptures with more advantage.

In the firſt place, when you open your Teſtaments, conſider, *it is God that ſpeaks*—conſider that he gave you this holy book with an intention to make you happy, both in this world, and the next. If a perſon in high authority were to ſpeak to you, you would receive what he ſaid with great reſpect: how much more ſhould you ſtand attentive, when God ſpeaks. With the utmoſt reverence and ſubmiſſion, therefore, you ſhould receive every thing you read in the ſcripture. The truth of this book is more fully proved, than that of any other book in the world: every thing, therefore, you read in it, ſhould be received with the deepeſt humility, faith, and ſubmiſſion. When we read the hiſtory of our Saviour's life and death, we ſhould receive it as truly as if it were acting before our eyes.

eyes. And when we read the precepts which the ſcriptures contain, we ſhould ſtrictly conſider them as the commands of God. We may indeed find the precept hard perhaps, and againſt the bent of nature; and may wiſh to make it a little more commodious for common uſe: but when we endeavour to force ſcripture to ſide with our inclinations, we are, in fact, guilty of a wicked attempt to deceive God. When we read ſcripture, therefore, we have only to ſay, God hath ordered us to do this; or, forbidden us to do that. And, where the precept and the inclination differ, it is evident which is to give way.—Reſiſting our own bad inclinations, is indeed the only proof we can give, that we are ready to ſubmit *our* will to the will of God.—— Again, when we read the promiſes and threatenings of God in ſcripture—the rewards laid up for the righteous, and the terrors in ſtore for the wicked, we ought to conſider them as objects, in a manner, realized before our eyes. They may be at ſome diſtance; but as it is the great God of heaven himſelf who threatens, and promiſes, they ſhould appear to us as immediately before us: we are well aſſured they will ſpeedily be ſo.—The *word doth not profit*, as the apoſtle

apoſtle ſpeaks, *unleſs it be thus attended with faith in them that hear it.*

The ſecond rule I ſhall give you, is, that when you read the holy ſcriptures, you ſhould not only conſider that *God ſpeaks*, but that *he ſpeaks immediately to you.* We ſhould apply every thing we read to ourſelves, or our reading will anſwer little end. Moſt men are excellent judges of the caſes of others; and can eaſily ſee where the ſcripture touches the ſins of a neighbour; while their own ſins, which are all they are really concerned with, lie in ſome other page: they are neglected and forgotten. This is exactly the caſe, which St. James repreſents, of a man *beholding his natural face in a glaſs: he beholdeth himſelf, and goeth away, and ſtraightway forgetteth what manner of man he was: while he* (the apoſtle adds) *who looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man ſhall be bleſſed in his deed.* You read the ſcriptures, therefore, to little purpoſe, unleſs you conſtantly conſider them as ſpeaking to your own caſe. Thus, for inſtance, when you read the parable of the wicked ſervant, who was puniſhed for his unforgiving temper, and read, at the end

of it, that ſolemn paſſage—*So alſo ſhall my heavenly Father do unto you, if you from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their treſpaſſes;* what effect ſhould it have upon you? Surely you ſhould immediately conſider, whether you are not yourſelf one of thoſe unforgiving perſons?—whether you may not, at this time, have ſome malicious thoughts in your heart? or, whether you ever reſolve that, as God is inclined to forgive you ſo many ſins, you will, for that reaſon, forgive the injuries of others?—Again, when you read in ſcripture, *Swear not at all; neither by heaven, for it is God's throne; neither by the earth, for it is his footſtool; neither by any other oath: but let your communication be yea, yea; nay, nay;* you ſhould conſider, whether you may not perhaps ſwear directly by your Maker: that you are forbidden to ſwear in any ſhape. Have you ever, then, directly applied this to yourſelf? The ſcriptures, you ſee, conſider every oath as ſwearing by God; becauſe it is ſuppoſed, that in every oath, either directly or indirectly, you appeal to God.——Conſider then, my brethren, how nearly it concerns each of you to apply this, and every part of ſcripture, to your own caſe. Conſider, that thoſe texts of ſcripture which you

now

now read, or ought to read, as rules for your direction, will hereafter, in the great day, become thoſe laws by which you ſhall be judged; and, if you have tranſgreſſed them, thoſe ſentences by which you ſhall be condemned. This is an awful conſideration, let me tell you. However you may deceive your own hearts, and ſhift the caſe from yourſelves to others, you will then find your miſtake cleared up, and may lament the folly of not attending to it ſooner.

The next rule I ſhall give you, regards thoſe difficulties which you will ſometimes find in ſcripture, even among its precepts. Though the precepts of ſcripture are generally very plain, yet it may happen, that now and then a text may have a tendency to miſlead you. The misfortune is, that on the plain religion of the goſpel a variety of opinions (and many of them very ſtrange and abſurd) have been ingrafted: and it happens that each of theſe opinions has a few leading texts, which plainly prove it, when theſe texts are conſidered without being joined to other parts of ſcripture. Thus, one man believes we are to be ſaved only by *faith*; for does not the ſcripture ſay, *by faith you are ſaved?* Another is as clear that we are to be ſaved by

works; becauſe the ſcripture as plainly ſays, *This do, and you ſhall live.* Whereas, in fact, neither one opinion, nor the other, is agreeable to the *whole tenor* of ſcripture; nor are theſe texts, nor any other that are uſually brought to prove theſe opinions, at all to the purpoſe, unleſs we read them as connected with thoſe paſſages from whence they are taken; or compare them with the general tenor of ſcripture. The ſtreſs in ſcripture is laid both on *faith* and on *works:* they are inſeparably united; and we may ſay of them, what Chriſt ſaid on another occaſion, *what God hath joined, let no man put aſunder.*— The true way, therefore, of interpreting every difficulty in ſcripture, is to conſider what *goes before*, and *what follows;* and if this does not lead you to the ſenſe, compare it with the whole tenor of the goſpel. Thus, for inſtance, you are ordered in ſcripture to *take no thought, what you ſhall eat, nor what you ſhall drink; nor wherewithal you ſhall be clothed.* It is evident this cannot be meant in a literal ſenſe; becauſe it is abſolutely neceſſary that we muſt take thought about theſe things, in a proper degree. Read on, therefore, and you will preſently ſee what is the true ſenſe of theſe words. In the next

verſes you read, *but ſeek ye firſt the kingdom of God, and his righteouſneſs, and all theſe things ſhall be added to you.* Here then you ſee plainly, that you *may* take thought about meat, and drink, and clothes; but you muſt ſeek the kingdom of God, and his righteouſneſs, *firſt*, and on them lay the principal ſtreſs.—Then again, ſome people have believed, that God Almighty, in an arbitrary manner—that is, without having any reſpect to the actions of men, hath elected ſome people to ſalvation, while he has doomed others to damnation. And, no doubt, many texts of ſcripture may be brought, which in *mere words* ſeem to have this meaning; nor may it be eaſy for thoſe, who are not ſkilled in ſcripture, to clear them of this difficulty.—In theſe caſes, then, compare ſuch harſh doctrines with the *general ſenſe* of ſcripture: there you will find it univerſally declared, that Jeſus Chriſt came to redeem *all* mankind, and not this or that perſon; and alſo, that we muſt all work *out our own ſalvation, with fear and trembling.* So that it is plain, if the goſpel have any intention, theſe doctrines cannot be true. Why was it given to all mankind, if all could not profit by it.

The laſt rule I ſhall give you for the profitable reading of ſcripture, is, to read it with a ſenſe of piety and devotion. If you have not a mind *deſirous* of the truth, and *wiſhing* to be rightly informed in the will of God, you may read ſcripture as unprofitably as you may read any other book. It is not reading a great deal of ſcripture—it is not reading it frequently, that will improve you in holy habits; unleſs you read it with a humble, devout mind, prepared to learn. It is the humble, devout mind, which our bleſſed Saviour calls *an honeſt and good heart, which keeps the word, and brings forth fruit with patience.* A mind thus diſpoſed, readily ſees in ſcripture what God would have us do: it enters into the ſenſe of ſcripture; and feels the force of what our Lord ſays—*If any man will do the will of God, he ſhall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God.* Not but that, with our beſt endeavours, we may have errors; and many good people, no doubt, though they read the ſcriptures piouſly, will have errors; but they who read them piouſly, can never have any errors that will hinder their ſalvation.——This pious frame of mind will be accompanied with devotion.

tion. The word of God abounds with ſubjects fitted to excite devotion: it will adminiſter frequent occaſions to a pious mind, not only of ſet forms of prayer, but of ſhort ejaculations, ariſing from the ſubject:—Aſſiſt me, O God, by thy holy Spirit, in attaining this heavenly mind, of which I have here an example:—or, Grant, O Lord, I may ever feel the abhorrence I now feel of that ſelf-deceit, [or of that wicked practice, whatever it may be,] of which I have now an inſtance before me! Devout prayer, thus intermingled with reading ſcripture, brings the great truths of it home to our hearts; and claims that gracious promiſe from God, that he will *give his holy Spirit to them that aſk him.* It is of this kind of heavenly wiſdom, of which St. James ſpeaks particularly when he tells us, that *if any man lack wiſdom, let him aſk of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it ſhall be given him.* They who read the ſcriptures without any devotion of heart to God, need not wonder if they continue ſtill unregenerate in heart, and ſtill under the influence of their bad habits.

To conclude then, from the whole, conſider, my brethren, the great end for which this ſacred

book was given you—to make you wiſe unto ſalvation—to teach you the way to pleaſe God—to ſhew you what your Creator, what your Redeemer, and what your Sanctifier have done for you; and what you are to do for yourſelves. All theſe things, which are the moſt important concerns you can have, (if we are only wiſe enough to think ſo,) this holy book will teach you. Let us then take it in our hands, as an adviſer in all our difficulties, and a comforter in all our diſtreſſes. While we liſten to its heavenly inſtructions, we cannot err. It will teach us both how to live, and how to die—how we may paſs, moſt comfortably to ourſelves, through this ſtate of trial—and how, after this pilgrimage is over, we may attain eternal life.

SERMON XVII.

JOHN, v. 39.

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES; FOR IN THEM YE HAVE ETERNAL LIFE.

IN my laſt diſcourſe I gave you ſome rules, that might be of uſe to you in reading the ſcriptures. I ſhall now, as I propoſed, go over the ſeveral chapters of St. Matthew's Goſpel; and endeavour to explain ſuch paſſages as may have difficulty in them.

IN the firſt chapter, we have the pedigree of Jeſus Chriſt from David. This ſhews that all thoſe prophecies were fulfilled, which foretold the Meſſiah's deſcent from that prince. At the eighteenth verſe begin the circumſtances of Chriſt's birth.

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The ſecond chapter gives an account of a very extraordinary viſit, which was paid to our Saviour at his birth, by the wiſe men, who came from the eaſt, and were directed by a ſtar to Bethlehem, where Jeſus was born. What is called *a ſtar*, is not ſuppoſed to be what we *commonly* call a ſtar; but that divine light which we frequently read of in ſcripture, when God Almighty makes any communication to man:—as when the children of Iſrael marched out of Egypt—when Moſes received the law—when the ſhepherds were informed of the birth of Chriſt—when he was baptized by John; and on many other occaſions. The *wiſe men* here mentioned, are ſuppoſed by many to be foreign Jews; as there were many Jews at that time, ſettled in different parts, who obtained a livelihood by inſtructing youth. From whatever country they came, the intention of God Almighty in ſending them probably was, to prepare the way for the preaching of the goſpel afterwards in thoſe countries where they dwelt.

The arrival of theſe eaſtern Magi, (as they are elſewhere called,) made ſome noiſe in Judea; eſpecially as they enquired for the *king of the Jews*; and Herod, the wicked king of the country,

try, began to fear that Jeſus, whom he conceived to be a rival prince, might, when he grew up, take his dominions from him. It is ſaid, that *Herod was troubled, and all Jeruſalem with him.* But Jeruſalem was not *troubled* in the ſame way in which Herod was troubled: they were only agitated, alarmed, and waited in anxious expectation of ſome great event.—In the mean time, Herod ſent for the chief prieſts, and enquired where this prince—this *king of the Jews*, as he was called, was to be born? They told him, that Bethlehem was the place marked by the prophets for his birth. He then ordered the wiſe men to let him know, when they had found the child, under a pretence that he might worſhip him alſo. God Almighty, however, made known to them the king's wicked intentions, and they returned home by another road; while Joſeph, by the ſame divine order, carried the holy child into Egypt. Herod, finding himſelf deſpiſed by the Magi, and not knowing that the child was ſent into Egypt, determined at any rate to deſtroy him; and put to death all the male children in the neighbourhood of Bethlehem.—In our tranſlation, we are told he put to death *all the children*; which makes Herod more

more wicked than he was; for in the original, it is only the *male children*.—Here Rachel, the wife of Jacob, had been buried; and St. Matthew introduces her weeping over her children, as a ſtill farther completion of the prophecy of Jeremiah, in which ſhe is repreſented weeping over thoſe who were gone into captivity.—After Herod's death, the holy child was brought from Egypt, and dwelt at Nazareth with his parents.

It was foretold by the prophets, that before Jeſus Chriſt ſhould appear, John the Baptiſt ſhould prepare the way. Accordingly the third chapter of St. Matthew opens with an account of this holy perſon. His manner of life is firſt deſcribed; his dreſs, which was of the coarſeſt kind; and his food, only what the deſert produced—wild honey, and locuſts. Honey was common in all parts of Judea: that country was called, you know, a land flowing with milk and honey. And locuſts were a kind of inſects very numerous in thoſe countries, and uſed by the common people as food.—This holy man began to preach repentance; and numbers of well-diſpoſed people came to his baptiſm, confeſſing their ſins. Among others, he ſaw many of the Phariſees and Sadducees, whom he knew to be wicked,

wicked, ill-diſpoſed people. He treated them accordingly with great freedom, and called them a generation of vipers—that is, a ſet of men who had miſchievous intentions. But he gives even them the hope of ſalvation, if they would repent. They had an opinion, it ſeems, that they ſhould be ſaved merely as being deſcended from Abraham. In this opinion, John tells them, they were miſtaken; *for God was able of the very ſtones to raiſe up children unto Abraham:* that is, as the goſpel was now about to be preached throughout the world, all mankind ſhould equally be conſidered as the children of Abraham, and were as numerous as the ſtones upon the ground. To draw them ſeriouſly to repentance, he tells them, *the ax was now laid at the root of the tree; and every tree that brought not forth good fruit, ſhould be hewn down, and caſt into the fire:* intimating, that before man had the light of the goſpel, God did not expect they could live up to the purity of its ruſes; but now, when they had that light, if they did not attend to it, they muſt expect the puniſhment they deſerved.

As John had reaſon to believe the people took him for Chriſt, he was deſirous to ſet them right; and told them, he was only the forerunner of Chriſt,

Chriſt, and was not worthy to do even the meaneſt offices for him—that he only baptized with water, but Chriſt ſhould baptize *with the Holy Ghoſt, and with fire;* alluding to that appearance of fire, which ſat on the heads of the apoſtles on their receiving the Holy Ghoſt. He added, that his *fan was in his hand, and he ſhould purge his floor;* that is, as the fan is an inſtrument which ſeparates the corn from the chaff, ſo ſhould the goſpel ſeparate good men from bad.

The evangeliſt proceeds to inform us, that Jeſus himſelf came to the baptiſm of John; which John, in humility, oppoſed. But Jeſus telling him it became him *to fulfil all righteouſneſs*—that is, his baptiſm was a proper preparation before he entered on his miniſtry; he was baptized; and immediately, a light ſhining round, a voice from heaven proclaimed him the Son of God. It is ſaid in the text, the *Spirit of God deſcended like a dove:* but it is not ſuppoſed *the ſhape of a dove is deſcribed*, but that a light hovered over Jeſus, in *the manner* in which a dove ſometimes hovers.

We come now to the fourth chapter of St. Matthew, in which we have firſt that remarkable

tranſaction

tranſaction of our Saviour's temptation by the devil. The reaſons of this temptation might be theſe:—That as our bleſſed Lord was to *die for ſin*, he might ſhew his followers that he could not himſelf be *tempted to ſin;* and was therefore a proper ſacrifice for the ſins of others—that beſides, as he was to aſſiſt his followers in withſtanding temptation, he might encourage them by ſhewing them he had himſelf experienced what temptation was. St. Paul tells us expreſsly, that *Chriſt was in all points tempted like as we are; but without ſin: and as he himſelf had ſuffered being tempted, he might ſhew himſelf able to ſuccour them that are tempted.*

With theſe views, being led by the Spirit into a ſolitary place, he underwent a long faſt; and at the concluſion of it was tempted by the devil. The tempter firſt made his application to the neceſſities of nature; and deſired Jeſus to ſhew his power, *by commanding the ſtones to become bread.* Jeſus gave his anſwer a ſpiritual turn: *We ſhould not*, ſays he, *live by bread alone, but by the word of God;* implying, that we ought to ſhew our obedience firſt to God, and then to depend on him for the neceſſaries of life.—If then we ought to depend upon God in all circumſtances,

cumſtances, replied the devil, placing Jeſus on the pinnacle of the temple, caſt thyſelf down from hence, and truſt in that God to prevent thy receiving harm. Jeſus replied, *Thou ſhalt not tempt the Lord thy God:* that is, it is enough to depend on God in ſuch trials as he chuſes to ſend upon us; but certainly wrong to throw ourſelves purpoſely into danger, with an expectation that God will deliver us.—The devil tried his next temptation on the paſſions of our Saviour. He preſented him, from a lofty mountain, with a view of every thing that was alluring and tempting in human affairs; and offered him the whole, if he would fall down and worſhip him. This drew from the holy Jeſus ſo ſevere a rebuke, as ſhewed the tempter that all his efforts were ineffectual.

I would juſt remark, that we muſt not judge of things that happened then by what we obſerve now. The devil, we ſuppoſe, tempts men now as much as he did in former times; but his power was more *viſible* then than it is now. He is called the *prince of the air;* and from his poſſeſſing people, as we read in ſcripture, it is plain he could formerly have ſhewn many inſtances of his power, which we never ſee now. Among other

other inſtances, it is probable, that on this occaſion, when he ſhewed our Saviour *all the kingdoms of the earth, and the glory of them*, he made an appearance in the air which reſembled all this ſplendour: and when he is ſaid to have ſet Jeſus on a *pinnacle of the temple*, it is not probable that he carried him to Jeruſalem; but that, in like manner, he raiſed an appearance of the temple, which ſeemed exactly like the real one. This interpretation ſeems to me, at leaſt, more probable than the literal one; and does not interfere with *the literal interpretation of the whole tranſaction*, being only an illuſive picture in the air, which may eaſily be ſuppoſed to be within the devil's power to create.

We come now to the fifth chapter, in which the evangeliſt begins our Saviour's *ſermon on the mount*, as it is called, which includes three chapters. I ſhall juſt explain ſuch difficulties in the courſe of them, as will, I hope, make them eaſy to you.

In the firſt place, though it is ſaid in the beginning, that when he was ſet *his diſciples came unto him*, it is plain, from ſeveral paſſages, that all the people at large were his hearers, as well as his particular diſciples.

Our bleſſed Lord begins with pronouncing bleſſings on ſeveral kinds of people, who, in the common opinion of the world, were objects of pity or contempt. It was generally believed, that when the Meſſiah came, he ſhould appear with all the grandeur and dignity of an earthly king; and ſhould raiſe his followers to the higheſt degree of power. This unworthy notion Jeſus began to check as ſoon as poſſible. He gives them to underſtand, therefore, that they had conceived very wrong notions of the Meſſiah's kingdom—that it was not the great and the powerful, the proud and the ambitious, that were to be members of his kingdom; but the poor in ſpirit—thoſe who are humble, and lowly-minded—thoſe who mourn for their ſins—thoſe who are meek—thoſe who hunger, as it were, and thirſt after righteouſneſs—thoſe who are merciful, and pure in heart; and thoſe who are ready at all times to make peace among others. If they intend to be his diſciples, he tells them fairly, they muſt expect, on many occaſions, to be perſecuted and ill-uſed for their religion. He calls them the *ſalt of the earth*; intimating, that as the great uſe of ſalt was to preſerve what would otherwiſe become corrupt, ſo it was their appoint-

appointment to oppoſe the corruptions of the world, and ſeaſon it, as it were, with wholeſome doctrine. Their good examples too, he tells them, were as neceſſary as their precepts: they ſhould be like a *city placed on a hill*, which every body might ſee. They ſhould conſider themſelves, therefore, as lights ſhining before men.

At the ſeventeenth verſe, Jeſus informs his hearers, that although his kingdom was of a different kind from what the Jews expected, yet it was not by any means his intention to deſtroy *the Jewiſh law, and the prophets*. He came to complete the moral law, and to fulfil the prophecies and Jewiſh ceremonies.—He then ſhews them how far the chriſtian morality was intended to be carried, beyond what the Scribes and Phariſees practiſed. They forbad murder, for inſtance; but he forbids every degree of malice and anger. The words *raca*, and *thou fool*, were, among the Jews, words of the worſt meaning; and implied a peculiar bitterneſs in thoſe who uſed them.—Our bleſſed Saviour then tells them, that as it is an eaſier matter to end a quarrel at the beginning, than by ſuffering it to proceed; ſo our boiſterous paſſions ſhould be early checked,

leſt they ſhould lead us into thoſe ſins which are ſo immediately connected with them.

With regard to the ſeventh commandment, he tells them, their teachers confined it to adultery; but his law carried it much higher. He required a purity in the thought; and that all thoſe luſts and paſſions, though as dear as an eye, or a right hand, which corrupt the purity of the mind, ſhould be reſtrained. And as to divorces, ſo frequent and ſo allowed among them, he forbad them in any caſe but in that of adultery.

Again, ſays he, the uſe of oaths is very frequent among you; and you are inſtructed, that if you do not forſwear yourſelves, ſwearing may be allowed. But the goſpel entirely forbids the uſe of oaths in common converſation: it forbids not only ſwearing by God, but by every thing elſe; becauſe, as every thing is the creature of God, an oath by the creature implies an oath by the Creator.

Then again, ſaid he, the Jewiſh teachers allow you to return evil for evil—requiring *an eye for an eye*, and *a tooth for a tooth*; but my religion enjoins you to return good for evil, anger with gentle-

gentleneſs, and injuries with kindneſs: *Whoſoever ſhall ſmite thee on the one cheek, turn to him the other alſo; and if any man will ſue at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak alſo: and whoſoever ſhall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.* The meaning of which expreſſions is, that in all little matters we ſhould rather give way, even when our juſt rights are invaded, than defend them with rigour and contention. We ſhould *give to him that aſketh; and from him that would borrow of us, we muſt not turn away:* that is, as far as our means enable us, we muſt be ready to aſſiſt our poor neighbours, either by giving or lending.—Nay, we muſt treat even thoſe with kindneſs, who perſiſt in the moſt obſtinate malice and wickedneſs towards us; and that, in imitation of our great Creator, *who maketh his ſun to riſe on the evil, and on the good; and ſendeth rain on the juſt, and on the unjuſt.* How beautifully is this example of our great Creator propoſed to our imitation; and in how ſtrong a light does it place the duty of returning good for evil! Thus, as our bleſſed Saviour declares, we become *the children of our Father who is in heaven.* For, if we love thoſe only who love us, and do good to thoſe only

who do good to us, we do but what the worſt of mankind will often do. Whereas we ought *to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect*; that is, we ought to imitate Him, *who makes his ſun to ſhine on the evil and the good*, by ſhewing kindneſs to thoſe who ſhew even unkindneſs to us.

HERE we conclude the fifth chapter of St. Matthew's goſpel. I propoſe to begin next with the ſixth. In the mean time, I could wiſh you to overlook both what I have been explaining to-day, in order to fix it in your memory, and likewiſe that you will overlook carefully two or three of the following chapters, particularly the ſixth and ſeventh, that you may have ready beforehand ſuch difficulties as you may wiſh to hear explained.

I ſhall detain you at preſent only to make a few remarks on what hath occurred this morning.

The dreadful ſtory of Herod's putting ſo many innocent children to death, ſhews to what height wickedneſs may be carried, if it be not ſtopped in the beginning.—It ſhews alſo, how impoſſible it is to attain our wicked ends in oppoſition to God,

God. Herod, with all his power, and all his wickedneſs, could not compaſs the death of the holy Jeſus. From this we learn, that it is our wiſeſt way to act always in a uniform courſe of duty, and leave events to God.

From our Saviour's telling the Phariſees and Sadducees, that if they did not profit in proportion to the light they received from chriſtianity, they ſhould increaſe their guilt, we ought to take warning. Our caſe reſembles theirs. If we wickedly reject the offers of the goſpel, let us remember the awful ſentence againſt us: *The axe is laid to the root of the tree; and every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit, ſhall be hewn down, and caſt into the fire.*

Laſtly, when we conſider our Saviour's temptation, we have reaſon to thank God for giving us warning, by ſo ſtriking an example, of the various modes of temptation which will beſet us —for ſhewing us the proper means of oppoſing them by the truths of religion—and for giving us a bleſſed aſſurance, that finally our ſtrenuous oppoſition will prevail, through the aſſiſtance of the Spirit of God, which is figured out by angels miniſtering to Chriſt.

SERMON XVIII.

JOHN, v. 39.

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES; FOR IN THEM YE HAVE ETERNAL LIFE.

IN my laſt diſcourſe, I went through the five firſt chapters of St. Matthew's goſpel. I come now to the ſixth, which is ſtill a continuance of our bleſſed Saviour's ſermon on the mount.

IT begins with directions about alms-giving; from which we underſtand, that he who performs a charitable action, with a view to the praiſe of men, muſt expect no other reward. We are God's ſervants, and ſhould do all our good actions with a view to pleaſe him. The expreſſion, *let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doth*, reſpects the ſame precept. We cannot always, it is true, *give alms* ſo ſecretly that

that nobody ſhall know of them; but we may always have a ſecret deſire and intention merely to pleaſe God. If we have any other motive, in the ſcripture phraſe, *we let our left hand know what our right hand doth.*

Our bleſſed Saviour's next inſtructions regard prayer. As we are not to give alms as the hypocrites do, ſo neither are we to follow their example in prayer. The Scribes and Phariſees, in our Saviour's time, uſed to pray in the ſtreets, *to be ſeen of men*, and to gain the character of holy and devout perſons. There is not quite ſo much hypocriſy now among us; yet many people among us, probably, go to church, and the ſacrament, becauſe it is a decent thing, without conſidering the great end of theſe appointments, and that nothing will ſanctify prayer, or make either our public or private devotions of any avail in the ſight of God, but hearts truly and ſincerely devoted to him. All other prayer is the prayer of hypocrites; and, ſo far, like the Phariſees.

We are told alſo, not to uſe *vain repetitions, as the heathen do; for they think they ſhall be heard for their much ſpeaking.* The heathen uſed to think there was religion in repeating a number

ber of prayers, though their hearts had nothing to ſay in them. One can hardly conceive how ſuch ſtrange notions could get among chriſtians; and yet in popiſh countries they are common. Poor, ignorant papiſts have often a taſk ſet them, or perhaps they ſet it themſelves, to ſay ſuch a number of prayers in a day; and they have a ſtring of beads, from which they drop one for every prayer, that they may know when they have performed their taſk. Such vain repetitions as theſe, indeed, we have not among us: but while we object to their manner of praying, let us conſider whether our prayers are not often taſks to us, which we think it neceſſary to perform; and which, perhaps, we do perform with as mere lip-ſervice as the moſt ignorant papiſt. A mere lifeleſs taſk-prayer, though it be not ſo bad as *praying openly in the corners of the ſtreets*, becauſe there is not ſo much hypocriſy in it, yet it certainly comes under the head of *uſing vain repetitions;* for indeed, unleſs we endeavour to ſend up the heart with the prayer, it is merely a *vain repetition* of words.

At the ninth verſe, our bleſſed Saviour begins with the *Lord's Prayer*, as it is called from its being given by our Lord. It is both intended

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as a prayer to be uſed by us, and as a form by which we ought to make our own prayers. In this prayer we are taught, firſt, to praiſe God: *Our Father, which art in heaven; hallowed* (or honoured) *be thy name.* We next pray, that all the world may become chriſtian, and live up to the precepts of religion: *Thy kingdom come: thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.* We pray next for our temporal wants: *Give us this day our daily bread*—then for our ſpiritual wants: *Forgive us our treſpaſſes; keep us out of temptation, and deliver us from all wickedneſs.* We conclude, as we began, by giving praiſe to God, and truſting in his power: *For thine is the kingdom, the power, and glory, for ever and ever.*

At the ſixteenth verſe, our Saviour gives us the ſame rules about faſting which he had before given about alms. Whatever religious ſeverities we uſe—faſting, ſelf-denial, or mortification of any kind—if we practiſe it with any view but to purify our hearts, and humble ourſelves before God, we may be ſure it can be no way pleaſing to him. It is the ſecret *humiliation* of ourſelves alone which will benefit us, or be regarded by God.

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Having been inſtructed in the only uſe of mortification, we are farther taught, at the nineteenth verſe, to ſit looſe to the things of this world; and to conſider our only real treaſure as placed in heaven. We are told, that *the light of the body is the eye;* that is, as the eye guides the body, ſo ought the preference we give to heavenly things guide the mind. He therefore, who is thus guided, will ſee his intereſt as clearly, as a man with his eyes open ſees his way before him. *But if our eye be evil, our whole body will be full of darkneſs:* that is, if we are guided merely by a love of earthly things, our whole conduct will be of a piece with it, and there will be nothing heavenly about us. For our bleſſed Saviour proceeds to tell us, we cannot ſerve two maſters at the ſame time: if we give ourſelves up to the world, it is impoſſible to ſerve God.—Nay he tells us, we ought not to be too ſolicitous even about the neceſſaries of life, and that for many reaſons:—In the firſt place, becauſe *life is more than meat, and the body than raiment.* If God give us life, we may reaſonably hope that he will ſupport that life: if he give us the greater, we may well ſuppoſe he will give us the leſs.—Secondly, becauſe

becauſe we ſee God takes care of the *fowls of the air, and the lilies of the field;* and we may be aſſured, that if God take care of the inferior part of the creation, he will alſo of the ſuperior. —Laſtly, he tells us, that all this ſolicitude is of no conſequence; becauſe, even *by taking thought, we cannot add one cubit to our ſtature:* that is, we can make no change nor alteration in things, even with all our anxiety, unleſs God pleaſes.— The great concluſion therefore is, that inſtead of being ſolicitous about the things of this world, *we ſhould ſeek firſt the kingdom of God, and his righteouſneſs;* and then truſt in him that all other things ſhall, in what proportion he pleaſes, *be added unto us.*

We come now to the ſeventh chapter, which begins with forbidding us to cenſure the actions of our neighbours, to which moſt people are too much addicted. Now this rule does not hold with regard to great and open ſins; but to thoſe numberleſs little offences, for which we have, probably, no better ground than a ſlight ſuſpicion. We are told, *that with what judgment we judge, we ſhall be judged; and with what meaſure we mete, it ſhall be meaſured to us again:* that is, the mercy, or ſeverity, we ſhew to others, will

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have great weight in the ſentence which God Almighty will paſs upon us.

Inſtead therefore of being thus ready to find a *mote in our brother's eye*, we are inſtructed to examine whether there is *not a beam in our own*. We muſt look at home, and amend our own faults, inſtead of troubling ourſelves with the faults of others. And, indeed, there is another reaſon given againſt general reproof:—We ſhould never reprove, but when there is a probable ground of ſucceſs. With many people all reproof is ineffectual: it is like *caſting pearls before ſwine; which will trample them under their feet, and turn again and rent you.*

Having given his hearers theſe inſtructions, our bleſſed Saviour proceeds to inform them, that prayer is the great mean of obtaining all the graces of a chriſtian. *We are to aſk, and it ſhall be given us; we are to knock, and it ſhall be opened:* for, as he is graciouſly pleaſed to tell us, if an earthly parent gives good things to his children, how much more *will your Father, who is in heaven, give good things to them that aſk him?* Be you therefore, adds our Saviour, as ready to do good to others, as your heavenly Father is to do good to you. Whatever you think it reaſonable

ſonable that others ſhould do to you, be you ready to do the ſame to them; for this is *the law and the prophets:* that is, all the precepts of the law and of the prophets are included in this one rule.

Jeſus next tells his hearers, that the precepts he had given them might perhaps be thought harſh; and, in fact, the gate which leadeth to life is ſtrait and narrow, whereas that which leadeth to deſtruction is broad and eaſy. Under the ſimilitude of the two gates, he ſhews the great danger of our being miſled by our paſſions and appetites; and inſtructs us, that we muſt be at ſome pains, and undergo ſome difficulties, in avoiding the temptations into which the broad way may lead us.—He bids us alſo *beware of falſe prophets, which come to us in ſheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.* This relates chiefly to the hypocritical pretences of the Scribes and Phariſees, who, under an outward appearance of holineſs, indulged themſelves in all their worldly habits. But though we, at this time, have nothing to do with the Scribes and Phariſees, yet the precept may be very well applied to us. We every where meet with theſe ravening wolves, who, by their wicked converſation

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and example, endeavour to make thoſe they converſe with as bad as themſelves. And though ſuch people are not very apt to come to us in *ſheep's clothing*, yet the example of bad people, in any clothing, is pernicious. If we can bear the ſight of wickedneſs, or liſten to ſwearing or other bad converſation without diſguſt, we are not ſafe.

Our Saviour proceeds next to give us a ſign, by which we may know ſuch people: *Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thiſtles?* As you know the vine therefore, and the fig-tree, by their fruits, ſo likewiſe may you judge of good and bad men. Wherever you ſee wicked actions, there, you may be ſure, the ſhew of religion is pretence.—Now, with regard to the Phariſees, it might be a nice matter to *know them by their fruits*, becauſe they *came in ſheep's clothing*; that is, they endeavoured to diſguiſe their bad actions as much as they could. But when you have to do with people who are not dreſſed in *ſheep's clothing*—that is, with people who do not diſguiſe their wickedneſs, you have then certainly the leſs excuſe, if you are miſled by them.—Conſider it therefore as a ſtrict rule to forbear, as much as you can, the company of all people among

among whom you ſee any wickedneſs. As our buſineſs in the world often leads us neceſſarily among bad people, we cannot help ſometimes being in their company; but we ſhould certainly avoid being more with them than we can help, or allowing ourſelves to find any pleaſure in their company.

Our bleſſed Saviour proceeds, laſtly, to inform us, that nothing but a holy, pious life, can procure for us God's favour at the laſt great day. Many, he tells us, will make pretences at that time, and cry, *Lord, Lord, have we not propheſied in thy name, and in thy name caſt out devils? But I will profeſs unto them, I never knew you; depart from me, ye that work iniquity:* that is, no religious profeſſions will be of any ſignificance, if they are not attended with holy lives. Though our own good deeds, when we have done our beſt, cannot procure us God's favour, yet they are neceſſary to make Chriſt's death efficacious. Chriſt died for all mankind: but we know, *they* only can receive the benefit of his death who have led holy lives; at leaſt, we have no ground from ſcripture to believe otherwiſe. To all who have led bad lives, our

Saviour's ſentence is—*I never knew you: depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity.*

Our bleſſed Saviour having brought his divine diſcourſe to a concluſion, illuſtrates his doctrine in the following manner:—*Whoſoever*, ſaith he, *heareth theſe ſayings of mine, and doth them, I will liken him unto a wiſe man, who built his houſe upon a rock; and the rains deſcended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that houſe, and it fell not; for it was founded upon a rock.* That is, he who founds his hopes on a conſcientious regard to the commandments of God—*he who heareth theſe ſayings of mine*, as our Saviour ſays, *and doth them*, need fear nothing which this world can bring upon him: its ſtorms and floods may beat againſt him—he may be viſited with poverty, or ſickneſs, or diſtreſs of any kind—his hopes are founded upon a rock: he never expected his happineſs from the things of this world; and if he never meets with what he never expected, it can be no diſappointment.

On the other hand, ſays our Saviour, *every one that heareth theſe ſayings of mine, and doth them not, ſhall be likened unto a fooliſh man, who built*

built his houſe upon the ſand: and the rains deſcended, and the winds blew, and beat upon that houſe, and it fell; and great was the fall thereof. That is, he who leaves the practice of religion out of the queſtion, and reſts his hopes on what elſe he pleaſes, will find they are founded like a houſe on a ſandy foundation—on the leaſt attack of the ſtorm, the whole will give way; there is nothing to ſupport it.

WITH this ſimilitude our bleſſed Saviour concluded his diſcourſe. In a foregoing chapter we have a *viſible exhibition*, as it were, of the various temptations we ſhould have to encounter in our paſſage through the world; and the proper modes of repelling them by the truths of ſcripture. We have here the ſame plan, in a manner, purſued;—the example commented on by precept. We are taught to conſider the world as a very ſuſpected inſtructor: all its maxims are contrary to the truths of the goſpel: they are calculated only for this life—the rules of the goſpel, for the next. We conceive a ſtill higher idea of the excellency of chriſtianity, when we find our bleſſed Saviour exalting it far above the law of Moſes.—Holy prayers, we next

learn, are the means to attain the graces of the Spirit. The broad way that leadeth to deſtruction, and the narrow way that leadeth to life, ſhould be continually in our thoughts.—One of the grand purpoſes of this divine diſcourſe is to ſhew, that no profeſſions of any kind, nor any religious opinions, will be of the leaſt avail, without a holy life.——The concluding paſſages of the ſixth chapter, *Therefore I ſay unto you, &c.* are among the moſt affecting parts of ſcripture. We cannot read them too often. If well obſerved, they would make us all, both rich and poor, as happy in our ſeveral ſtations as this world can allow. They ſhould, indeed, be preſent with us in all our worldly concerns; as they give us the juſteſt ideas of human life: they come home to our feelings, as we are placed in a world abounding with many difficulties, and point out the only true way of paſſing through them.

When our Saviour had finiſhed his diſcourſe, we are told, the people *were aſtoniſhed at his doctrine; for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the ſcribes:* that is, they could eaſily diſtinguiſh between the noble truths which he told them, and the cold and trifling diſcourſes of the Scribes and Phariſees.

Let us follow their example; and, receiving theſe great precepts of religion as coming from *one having authority*, let us eſteem it our higheſt intereſt to ſubmit to that authority, and conſcientiouſly to obey it.

SERMON XIX.

JOHN, v. 29.

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES; FOR IN THEM YE HAVE ETERNAL LIFE.

IN the eighth chapter, which I now begin, we have an account of our Saviour's firſt miracle.—By thus ſhewing he had the power of working miracles, he ſhewed alſo that he had authority to make laws. The miracles which he wrought were indeed a double proof of his authority:—they firſt proved it, by ſhewing that he acted under the power of God; and, ſecondly, they proved it, by completing thoſe prophecies which aſcribed ſuch miracles to the Meſſiah.—But, if our Saviour's miracles had been intended only to prove his authority, his power over nature, as when he ſtilled a ſtorm by ſpeaking a word, had been ſufficient: but they had the farther end—

end—of benefiting mankind, and of giving them a proof of his kind intention to heal their ſpiritual diſorders, by his goodneſs in curing their bodily infirmities; according to that of Iſaiah, where the Meſſiah is repreſented as *bearing our ſickneſſes;* meaning both thoſe of the ſoul and the body.

The miracle which our Saviour firſt performed was on a perſon afflicted with the leproſy, who, expreſſing his faith in Jeſus's power, begged his almighty aſſiſtance. Jeſus healed him by a word; but ordered him, by no means to neglect what the law required: *Go, ſhew thyſelf,* ſaid he, *to the prieſt; and offer the gift which Moſes commanded for a teſtimony unto them:* that is, he was to offer his gift at the temple, as a proof of his being perfectly cured, to all who wiſhed for that teſtimony.

One thing more is remarkable in this miracle: Jeſus forbids the leper to make any open publication of the cure. The reaſon of this probably was, that Jeſus might wiſh to avoid drawing crowds of people about him, which an open ſhew of his miraculous power might have invited. They were ready to riſe into inſurrections when they were inflamed by any thing of this kind;

and Jeſus cautiouſly avoided giving them any handle. It was propheſied of him, that quietneſs ſhould attend all his actions; and the completion of this prophecy would ſtill more convince all well-diſpoſed perſons of his truth.—— Perhaps, too, our bleſſed Lord, by ordering his miraculous actions to be concealed, might chuſe to ſhew his diſciples with what modeſty, quietneſs, and ſecrecy, all their good actions ſhould be attended. He had given the precept before: he now gave the example.

After performing this cure, we are told, he went to Capernaum, where a centurion, or officer in the Roman army, came to him, deſiring him to heal a favourite ſervant. On Jeſus's offering to go with him, the centurion begged him to ſpeak a word only at that diſtance, which would be ſufficient to heal his ſervant:—"For if I," ſaid he, "who am only an inferior officer in an army, can at a diſtance give orders to my ſoldiers, and be punctually obeyed, how much more may I ſuppoſe that you, on ſpeaking a word, may heal my ſervant, though at ſo great a diſtance."—This faith of the centurion appeared in ſo ſtrong a light to Jeſus, that he declared he had found in this heathen a greater inſtance of

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it, than he had found among the Jews themſelves. He then diſmiſſed him, with an aſſurance that he ſhould find his ſervant recovered; telling the people, at the ſame time, that *many ſhould come from the Eaſt, and from the Weſt, and ſhould ſit down with Abraham, Iſaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven: but the children of the kingdom ſhould be caſt out into outer darkneſs; there ſhould be weeping and gnaſhing of teeth:* the meaning of which is, that the Gentiles ſhould have the goſpel offered to them, and numbers ſhould accept it; while many of the Jews ſhould draw upon themſelves that puniſhment, which their hardened infidelity deſerved.

This account of the centurion is followed by a relation of other miracles which Jeſus wrought at this time, particularly on Peter's mother-in-law, whom he cured of a fever.

The town of Capernaum, where Jeſus now was, lay upon a large lake, which is called in ſcripture, ſometimes the ſea of Tiberias, and ſometimes the lake of Geneſeret. Jeſus, therefore, perceiving that the multitude was now come about him in ſuch inconvenient numbers, that he either could not inſtruct them properly, or feared ſome tumult from them, ordered his diſciples

diſciples to prepare a boat for him to paſs over the lake.

As he was embarking, he took an opportunity of diſcovering the inſincerity of ſome who profeſſed themſelves to be his diſciples. He informed one, who followed him with ſome worldly view, *that foxes had holes, and the birds of the air had neſts; but the Son of Man had not where to lay his head:* that is, if he gave himſelf up to the goſpel, he muſt not expect any worldly returns, but muſt lay his account for a life of difficulty.—Another declared his readineſs to follow Jeſus; but firſt *deſired leave to bury his father.* Some explain this, as if he wiſhed to live with his father till he died: but whether this was the meaning, or it was really what the words expreſs, Jeſus, who knew the man's heart, ſaw this to be only a worldly pretence; and therefore conſidered him as an improper diſciple of the goſpel. *Let the dead,* ſaid he, *bury their dead:* that is, let the affairs of the world be left to worldly men.

As they were paſſing the lake, a violent ſtorm aroſe, which Jeſus immediately calmed with a word. It is probable he wrought this miracle to confirm the faith of his diſciples, by ſhewing them

them he had power, not only over men, but over the elements. It ſeems, at leaſt, that his diſciples took it in this light, when they cried out, *What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the ſea obey him?* as if the power which he ſhewed over the winds and ſtorms, placed his authority in a ſtill ſtronger light than any thing he had yet done.

When he arrived at the other ſide of the lake, he performed that remarkable miracle, in which he gave the devils leave to enter into a herd of ſwine. This is the only miracle of the bleſſed Jeſus that ever brought loſs or damage to any one: nor do we eaſily know the reaſons which induced him to bring ſuch a loſs upon the Gergeſenes. In general, it is ſuppoſed, that it was done by way of puniſhment to theſe people, whether they were Jews or Gentiles. If they were Jews, it is ſaid, they were puniſhed juſtly for keeping ſwine, which was forbidden by their law. And if they were Gentiles, as they lived there on ſufferance from the Jews, they were alſo puniſhed juſtly, for keeping ſwine as a ſnare to lead the Jews into ſin.—It ſeems very probable, that the people themſelves conſidered it as a judgment for their ſins: *for the whole city*

came

came out to meet him; and, as if afraid of ſome farther puniſhment, *beſought him to depart out of their coaſts.*——In the beginning of the ninth chapter, therefore, we are informed, that Jeſus returned to Capernaum; as he found the Gergeſenes not yet ſufficiently prepared to receive the goſpel.

When his coming was known, a man afflicted with a palſy was brought to him. Jeſus obſerving that ſeveral of the Scribes, or doctors of the law, were mixed with the multitude, choſe to take this opportunity to give them a convincing proof of the efficacy of the goſpel; by the whole tenor of which the ſins of every *new convert*, on his faith and repentance, were immediately forgiven. Knowing, therefore, that the man had faith ſufficient to be a convert to chriſtianity, he told him, *his ſins were forgiven.* This the Scribes conceived within themſelves to be direct blaſphemy: when Jeſus, giving them a new inſtance of his almighty power by diſcovering their thoughts, aſked them, whether they did not think the ſame power, which could cure a diſeaſe by ſpeaking a word, was able alſo to forgive ſin? He then healed the man, and left the Scribes to their own malice; while the people, ſtruck

ſtruck with the juſtneſs of what he had ſaid, glorified God for ſending ſo great a prophet among them.

We are next informed how St. Matthew, the writer of this goſpel, was called to be a diſciple; which he himſelf tells us, with great modeſty. As Jeſus was walking by the ſide of the lake, he ſaw Matthew ſitting at his booth, collecting the Roman taxes; for he was a publican—that is, a tax-gatherer. Jeſus, no doubt, obſerving the modeſty and ſimplicity of the man, bade him follow him as a diſciple, which Matthew immediately did. Jeſus accompanying him to his houſe, met there a number of people of bad lives, Matthew's former acquaintance, whom he had probably invited to gain inſtruction from Jeſus; and to be converted, as he himſelf had been, of the badneſs of their lives.—No men had a worſe name among the Jews than theſe tax-gatherers. The Phariſees, therefore, took great offence at our Saviour, on ſeeing him in ſuch company. Jeſus aſked them, whether they thought the healthy, or the ſick, had more need of a phyſician? He then bade them conſider, whether thoſe works of mercy in which he was engaged, or thoſe rites and ceremonies of the law, in which they thought

thought religion conſiſted, were more pleaſing to God? He laſtly told them, he was then engaged in the very work which he came into the world to accompliſh—that of calling ſinners to repentance.

About this time, ſome of the diſciples of John the Baptiſt aſked Jeſus, Why *his* diſciples did not faſt, as *they*, and the diſciples of the Phariſees were inſtructed to do? Jeſus ſaid, *Can the children of the bride-chamber mourn while the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom ſhall be taken away, and then ſhall they faſt.* The meaning of which expreſſion is, that while I am with them, who may be conſidered as the bridegroom, they cannot mourn; but after my death, they muſt expect a time of ſuffering and ſelf-denial. Jeſus added, *No man putteth a piece of new cloth into an old garment; for that which was put in to fill it up, taketh from the garment, and the rent is made worſe: neither do men put new wine into old bottles; elſe the bottles break, and the wine runneth out, and the bottles periſh: but they put new wine into new bottles, and both are preſerved.* That is, as my diſciples have yet their worldly prejudices about them, which may be compared to an old garment,

ment, it would not be proper for me at once to put upon them the ſevere and harſh doctrines of religion, which would be like piecing the old garment with new cloth. The new part would too violently tear away the old, and the garment would not be amended.—"If new wine, alſo," ſaid Jeſus, "ſhould be put into old bottles, both would be loſt; but when my diſciples, like new bottles, ſhall be able to contain new wine—that is, their new doctrine, they ſhall be inſtructed in it."—You will remember that the Jewiſh bottles were made of leather.

The next miracles recorded, are thoſe of the woman with the iſſue of blood, and the ruler's daughter; in neither of which there ſeems to be any difficulty. When Jeſus ſaid, *The maid is not dead, but ſleepeth*, it is plain he meant, her death ſhould only have the effect of ſleep.—Neither is there any difficulty in the next miracle recorded —that of the blind man.

With regard to the miracle of the man poſſeſſed with a devil, we find here another inſtance that the devil had, in thoſe days, more outward power than he has now. How far his wicked agents ſtill tempt mankind, we know not. The ſcriptures, every where, ſeem to conſider us always

ways under this inviſible temptation; but the devil might have more *viſible* power before chriſtianity, to ſhew how much the power of Chriſt was ſuperior.

After theſe miracles are particularly recorded, we are told in general, that Jeſus went about all the country, healing the ſick, and preaching the goſpel. As numbers followed him in every place, he compared them to ſheep without a ſhepherd; alluding to ſuch miſerable guides as the Scribes and Phariſees, who were their former inſtructors. He then obſerved to his diſciples, on ſeeing the numerous crowds that ſurrounded them, that the harveſt was great, though the labourers were few; and bade them pray to God to enable them to be thoſe faithful labourers, who ſhould reap this plentiful harveſt by properly inſtructing the people.

We are told, therefore, in the beginning of the tenth chapter, that Jeſus ſent forth his twelve diſciples to preach; and ordered them to go only among the cities of Iſrael, as to thoſe the goſpel was firſt offered. He gave them power to work miracles; forbade them to provide more than the neceſſaries of life; and for the reſt, to depend on God.—The following part of the

the chapter is employed in giving them inſtructions. Such paſſages as are more difficult, I ſhall endeavour to explain to you. *If the houſe be worthy, your peace ſhall come upon it*—it ſhall enjoy the benefit of your preaching: *but if the houſe be not worthy, your peace ſhall return to you again*—*you* ſhall be bleſſed, though *it* refuſes the bleſſing. The meaning of *ſhaking the duſt off their feet*, is this:—It was a cuſtom among the Jews, when they travelled into any foreign country, to ſhake the duſt off their feet when they returned home, leſt they ſhould pollute their own holy ground with the ſoil of a heathen country. To this cuſtom our Saviour alludes; and what he ſays amounts to this:—That if they would not liſten to the goſpel, they ſhould be accounted as heathen people. When Jeſus tells his diſciples, *they ſhould be brought before governors and kings, for a teſtimony againſt them, and the Gentiles*, he means, that when they anſwered for themſelves, if their preaching and miracles were not attended to by thoſe who heard them, they ſhould be left without excuſe.—Jeſus then tells his diſciples what great oppoſition his religion ſhould occaſion in the world: it ſhould even make quarrels among the neareſt relations.

Ye ſhall be hated of all men, ſays he, *for my name's ſake; but he that endureth to the end ſhall be ſaved:* that is, he who endureth the perſecutions of the world for the ſake of the goſpel, ſhall be rewarded with everlaſting life. Jeſus farther tells his diſciples, *that they ſhall not have gone over the cities of Iſrael, till the Son of Man ſhould come:* that is, they ſhould not have preached through the country of Judea, till Jeruſalem ſhould be deſtroyed; for that is in many places, and apparently in this, the meaning of the *coming of the ſon of man.*—Our Saviour then adds this reaſon for their not fearing the perſecutions of the world: *There is nothing covered*, ſays he, *that ſhall not be revealed; nor hid, that ſhall not be made known:*—a time will come, when every thing ſhall be brought to light; when the ſecrets of all hearts ſhall be revealed, and the cauſe of the good chriſtian ſhall appear in the faireſt point of view. He orders them, therefore, to *ſpeak in the light, what they ſhould hear in darkneſs:* that is, to ſpeak publicly what they ſhould hear in private, *and preach it upon the houſe-tops;* that is, in the plaineſt and openeſt manner: for the houſes in Judea had flat roofs, where the people uſed to walk, and from thence to ſpeak

to

to thoſe in the ſtreet. To this cuſtom our Saviour alludes.—The next paſſage which requires explanation, is that in which our Saviour ſays, he is *not come to ſend peace, but a ſword, into the world;* and then mentions his ſetting families at variance among themſelves. Now the meaning of this is no more, than that the purity of the goſpel is ſo contrary to the prejudices of the world, that it will of courſe ſet the bad part of mankind in oppoſition to the good; and when there are good and bad of the ſame family, they will of courſe be divided.—Our Saviour laſtly pronounces a bleſſing on all who ſhall receive the goſpel entirely for its own ſake, without any worldly conſideration; and ſhall ſhew a ſincere regard for it, merely for the ſake of God and Jeſus Chriſt. And though they can only in the ſmalleſt degree promote its influence, yet they give that evidence of their religion, which ſhall certainly find its reward.

THIS verſe concludes the tenth chapter. In my next diſcourſe I ſhall begin with the eleventh.

SERMON XX.

JOHN, v. 29.

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES; FOR IN THEM YE HAVE ETERNAL LIFE.

THE eleventh chapter begins with a very extraordinary circumſtance. John the Baptiſt, who is now impriſoned by Herod, ſends two of his diſciples to Jeſus to enquire, whether he was the Meſſiah? Who could have imagined that John, who was himſelf the expreſs forerunner of Jeſus —who had ſeen the Holy Ghoſt deſcend upon him, and had himſelf borne the ſtrongeſt witneſs to his being the Meſſiah, ſhould now begin to doubt! We cannot therefore, by any means, admit this ſuppoſition. We have no reaſon, therefore, to believe, that John had *himſelf* the leaſt doubt about the matter.—The caſe, then, ſeems to be this:—John was now in priſon: his miniſtry

miniſtry was at an end; and he expected every day to be deprived of his life by the wicked tyrant, who had deprived him of his liberty. In this ſituation he was uneaſy about his diſciples, who had followed him to priſon; and would be left greatly at a loſs, when he ſhould be taken from them. He ſeems deſirous, therefore, of turning them over, as it were, to Jeſus; that they might find a better maſter when they ſhould loſe him. But as there had been ſome little jealouſies between the diſciples of John and thoſe of Jeſus, as we read in the fourteenth verſe of the ninth chapter, the Baptiſt might wiſh to have all theſe at an end; and to have his diſciples *convince themſelves* of the great truth, that Jeſus was the Meſſiah. With this view he ſent two of them to Jeſus to make the enquiry, well knowing how convincing an anſwer they ſhould receive. Jeſus accordingly, inſtead of giving them a direct anſwer, wrought ſeveral miracles in their ſight: *the blind ſaw, the lame walked, the lepers were cleanſed, the deaf heard, and the dead were raiſed.* Now theſe were expreſsly thoſe very miracles which the prophet Iſaiah foretold the Meſſiah ſhould work *. The argument, there-

* Iſa. xxv. 6. and lxi. 1.

fore, which Jeſus uſed to convince the diſciples of John, was not only drawn from the miracles which he wrought, but from the prophecies which he fulfilled. As if he had ſaid, "The Prophets have laid down ſuch and ſuch marks or characters, by which the Meſſiah ſhall be known. Theſe characters, you ſee, are fulfilled in me; therefore you muſt acknowledge me to be the Meſſiah."—By this argument, it is probable, the diſciples of John were convinced; for we afterwards find ſeveral of them joining themſelves as diſciples to Jeſus.

When they were gone, Jeſus bore teſtimony to John. He put the people in mind of their going out into the wilderneſs in ſuch multitudes to ſee him. None, he ſaid, could ſuppoſe, that a trifling matter could call ſuch a concourſe together. Nor had they, on the other hand, any reaſon to ſuppoſe they ſhould ſee an inſtance of human grandeur. A Prophet, then, was what they expected to ſee; and a Prophet, in fact, they did ſee; and ſuch a Prophet as the world had never before ſeen: though, at the ſame time, Jeſus told them, *that he who was leaſt in the kingdom of heaven was greater than he:* that is, as John was only the forerunner of the goſpel, the

the miniſters of the goſpel itſelf had a more excellent miniſtry entruſted to them than John had. Jeſus then adds the following words, which have ſome difficulty in them: *From the days of John until now, the kingdom of heaven ſuffereth violence; and the violent take it by force: for all the prophets and the law propheſied until John; and if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was to come.* The meaning of this expreſſion ſeems to be, that the kingdom of heaven, or God's church, was not confined, as the Jewiſh religion had been, to a favoured few; but was now, after the time of John, open to all mankind—even to publicans and ſinners, the worſt of men; who, with a kind of holy violence, preſſed into it. And as the Jews expected, from a prophecy of Malachi, (iv. 5.) that Elijah, who had been carried up into heaven, ſhould return before the Meſſiah appeared, Jeſus tells them, that prophecy was not to be underſtood literally, but was meant of John, who ſhould come in the *power and ſpirit* of Elijah: and therefore, that prophecy was now complete.

Jeſus then tells the people, that they who oppoſed the doctrines of the goſpel were like fro-

ward children, who were out of temper with every thing. John's manner of life, and his own, were very different. John's was a life of auſterity; his, more free and unreſerved; but both gave equal offence. While John was ſaid to be poſſeſſed with a devil; he was called a glutonous man, and a wine-bibber. *But wiſdom*, he tells them, *ſhould be juſtified of her children*: the truth would come out clear in the end.

This evil diſpoſition of mankind led Jeſus to upbraid the ſeveral cities in which he had wrought miracles, becauſe they had not repented. There is nothing difficult, however, in this paſſage.

He then broke out into an ardent thankſgiving to God, not, as the words ſeem to expreſs, for hiding the goſpel from the wiſe and learned, but for making it eaſily underſtood by the loweſt of the people:—by people of worldly tempers, it cannot be underſtood; but by thoſe humble ſpirits only who are diſpoſed to receive it.

Then, turning to the people, he told them, that every thing relating to the goſpel was delivered unto him by the Father; and that none could expect ſalvation, therefore, but through him.

him *. He exhorted them, therefore, in theſe tender words: *Come then unto me, all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you reſt. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek, and lowly of heart, and ye ſhall find reſt unto your ſouls: for my yoke is eaſy, and my burden is light.*

The twelfth chapter begins with an inſtance of that ſpirit of malice with which the Jews always perſecuted Jeſus. You remember the ſtory of the diſciples paſſing through the corn-fields, and rubbing the corn in their hands, to ſatisfy their hunger; and you remember alſo what offence it gave to the Phariſees, not becauſe the diſciples had taken what did not belong to them, for the law of Moſes expreſsly ſays, *When thou comeſt into the ſtanding corn of thy neighbour, thou mayeſt pluck the ears with thy hand; but thou mayeſt not put a ſickle into it* †. The diſciples therefore, in this light, had done nothing wrong; but the great offence was, they had done it on the

* Both before chriſtianity, and now among heathen nations, we ſuppoſe that ſin can only be forgiven through the atonement of Chriſt.

† Deut. xxiii. 25.

ſabbath;

ſabbath: *Behold*, ſaid they, *thy diſciples do what is not lawful to do on the ſabbath-day*. On a common day they might have done it; but on the ſabbath, as the Phariſees pretended, it was utterly unlawful. Jeſus anſwered theſe hypocrites, by putting them in mind of what David had done on a like occaſion; when he eat, in a caſe of neceſſity, the ſhew-bread, which the law allowed only to the prieſts. The prieſts alſo, he told them, were obliged to do many things, in their temple-ſervice, on the ſabbath, which the neceſſity of the caſe rendered perfectly innocent. Beſides, he told them, the Son of Man was Lord of the ſabbath; and that his diſciples, acting by ſuch authority, were blameleſs.—In ſhort, he gave them to underſtand by quoting a paſſage from ſcripture, in which God ſays, *I will have mercy, and not ſacrifice*, that he laid a much greater ſtreſs on acts of piety and charity, than on mere forms and ceremonies; among which he conſidered ſuch a ſcrupulous obſervance of the ſabbath as excluded all caſes of neceſſity. The ſabbath, no doubt, was to be reverenced; but not in that hypocritical manner in which they reverenced it.

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The ſame malice was ſhewn with regard to the man with the withered hand; but in this paſſage there is no difficulty.

We are next told, that Jeſus retired to a private place to avoid the Phariſees. But he was followed by multitudes, and wrought many miracles among them; ordering them, at the ſame time, not to make a public boaſt of what he had done for them.—This ſecrecy ſeems to be intended chiefly as a leſſon to his diſciples, not to make their good deeds matter of oſtentation; but to do them in ſecret, deſiring no witneſs but God. By this quiet behaviour alſo, St. Matthew ſays, Jeſus fulfilled a prophecy of Iſaiah, which ſpeaks not only of the mighty works which he ſhould perform, but of the quietneſs with which he ſhould perform them: *He ſhall not ſtrive, nor cry; neither ſhall any man hear his voice in the ſtreets. A bruiſed reed ſhall he not break; and ſmoaking flax ſhall he not quench.* Flax was uſed by the Jews in their lamps; ſo that the expreſſion, *ſmoaking flax ſhall he not quench*, means the ſame as *a bruiſed reed ſhall he not break.* That is, inſtead of afflicting thoſe who are already afflicted, he will with gentleneſs and kindneſs relieve them.

We

We are next informed of his healing a blind and dumb man, who was poſſeſſed with a devil. This great miracle the Phariſees aſcribed to his being in league with Beelzebub, the prince of the devils.—Jeſus ſhewed them how impoſſible ſuch a ſuppoſition was, from his conſtant oppoſition to the works of the devil. If Satan, ſaid he, ſhould caſt out Satan, he would oppoſe himſelf, and his kingdom could not ſtand.—Beſides, as their own children pretended to caſt out devils; and as they pretended to do it by the power of God, not by the power of the devil, Jeſus only deſired them to allow as much to him as they were willing to allow to their friends. *If then*, ſaid Jeſus, *I caſt out devils by the Spirit of God, the kingdom of God is come unto you:* that is, you muſt believe that the doctrines of the goſpel which I teach are true. I have ſhewn you that I am ſtronger than the devil, by diſpoſſeſſing him. As our views, therefore, are different, it is apparent what mine are, by being oppoſite to his.—This ſeems to be the meaning of the 29th and 30th verſes.——The next verſe contains what our Saviour ſays in relation to the ſin againſt the Holy Ghoſt. He had juſt, you ſee, been caſting out a devil; which the Phariſees aſcribed

aſcribed to his being in league with the devil. This was ſo directly againſt the truth, and againſt their own conſciences, (as they could not but ſee the utter impoſſibility of it,) that Jeſus calls it the ſin againſt the Holy Ghoſt; and ſays, *it can neither be forgiven in this world, nor in the world to come:* which I conceive implies, not the *impoſſibility* of its being forgiven upon repentance, but the great *difficulty* of repenting; for if the Phariſees were not convinced by ſuch miracles as theſe, done on the ſpot before their eyes, they would of courſe reſiſt every other kind of evidence, and muſt therefore die in their ſins.—Jeſus then tells them, that as the fruit would always be good or bad, according to the nature of the tree; ſo men's lives and actions would be according to the diſpoſition of their hearts: ſo that their mere actions, however good they might appear, if they proceeded not from a well-diſpoſed, religious heart, ſignified nothing. He moreover tells them, they ſhould be accountable even for their *idle words*. *Idle* here, according to the Jewiſh manner of ſpeaking, means *wicked*. They had been ſpeaking blaſphemy juſt before; and Jeſus tells them, they might be aſſured that

for their wicked words, as well as their wicked actions, they ſhould be condemned.

We read next, that notwithſtanding the many miracles which Jeſus had performed, the Scribes and Phariſees ſtill demanded another ſign. But Jeſus told them he would give them no farther ſign, but the ſign of the prophet Jonas:—As Jonas had been three nights and three days in the whale's belly, he was a type of Chriſt, who ſhould lie three days and three nights in the grave. This ſtory of Jonas's being three days and three nights in the whale's belly, is one of thoſe wonderful ſtories that gives great offence to thoſe, who will not believe that an age of miracles ever exiſted, but will reduce every thing to the ſtandard of their own times. But why ſo? As Jonas was meant to be a type, or ſign, of our Saviour's reſurrection; and as our Saviour's reſurrection was a very wonderful event, the type alſo muſt be ſomething of a very wonderful kind, or it could not repreſent what was intended by it.—Our Saviour then tells the Scribes and Phariſees, the men of Nineveh ſhould riſe in judgment againſt them; for they repented at the preaching of Jonas, who was far inferior to Chriſt.

Chriſt. The queen of Sheba, too, ſhould riſe in judgment againſt them; for ſhe came from a diſtant country to hear the wiſdom of Solomon, while they heard, with indifference, the doctrine of a ſtill greater preacher.—Jeſus then tells them, *that when the unclean ſpirit is gone out of a man, he* [or, as it ſhould be tranſlated, *it*] *walketh through dry places, ſeeking reſt and finding none. Then ſaith it, I will return to my houſe from whence I came out; and finding it empty, ſwept, and garniſhed, it goeth and taketh with itſelf ſeven other ſpirits more wicked than itſelf, and they enter in, and dwell there; and the laſt ſtate of that man is worſe than the firſt. Even ſo ſhall it be alſo unto this wicked generation.*—This is rather a difficult paſſage. The ſenſe in which it is, I think, beſt underſtood, is this: The man, from whom the unclean ſpirit was driven out, repreſents the Jews, who had the law of Moſes given them, which might be ſuppoſed to drive the ſpirit out. For a time it did; but this evil ſpirit, or ſpirit of wickedneſs, returns to the Jews again, and in our Saviour's time had increaſed ſevenfold. Even ſo ſhall it be, our Saviour adds, to this *wicked generation*—or, this is the caſe of this wicked generation.

While

While theſe things were tranſacting, Jeſus was informed that *his mother and brethren ſtood without, deſiring to ſpeak with him.* Jeſus, taking this opportunity as he did all others, of giving his hearers an inſtructive leſſon, ſaid, Theſe, indeed are my natural relations; but I conſider thoſe chiefly as related to me, whom I may call my ſpiritual relations—that is, ſuch as take a pleaſure in doing the will of God.——This concludes the twelfth chapter. I ſhall proceed no farther at preſent; but only make a few practical obſervations on what I have been explaining.

From the ſtory of John the Baptiſt ſending his diſciples to Jeſus, we are led to the true proof of the chriſtian religion, which principally depends on prophecy and miracles. This is the proof which we ſee our Lord himſelf refers to, when he was appealed to in the moſt ſolemn manner.

From Jeſus's deſcription of the men of that generation, who were like froward children in the market-place, and would not be influenced by any inſtruction, let *us* take care to be men of a different generation; and if we are not moved by the promiſes of the goſpel, let us be influenced at leaſt by its threatenings.

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From Jeſus's thankſgiving to God, that the truths of the goſpel were laid open to the meek and lowly, let us endeavour to purify our hearts from all the pride and vanity of this world, that we may poſſeſs ſuch humbleneſs of mind as alone can qualify us for receiving theſe truths.

From Chriſt's telling us that his yoke is eaſy, let us endeavour to find out, as we certainly may by practice, that it is ſo; notwithſtanding the difficulties we may meet with. What *he* tells us, muſt be true.

From the ſtory of the corn-field, and the man with the withered hand, we are taught to lay the ſtreſs in religion, where it ought to be laid—not on outward forms and ceremonies, but on a good heart and life. Even attending the church and ſacrament may be conſidered as outward forms, if the heart be not mended. The Phariſees went conſtantly to church, though our Saviour calls them a generation of vipers.

When we ſee our Saviour retiring from the Phariſees, we are taught how to act when we have to do with paſſionate, angry, and malicious men: it is our beſt way to leave them to themſelves; no good will come from entering into diſpute with ſuch people.

When we hear that dreadful ſentence againſt the ſin of the Holy Ghoſt, and reflect, that men may bring themſelves by their wickedneſs to ſuch a ſtate as will hardly admit repentance, let us guard againſt the beginning of every ſin, not knowing how ſoon it may increaſe to this dreadful point.

When we ſee our Saviour refuſing to give the Phariſees another ſign, let us be content with that evidence of the truth of the goſpel which hath been given us; aſſuring ourſelves, that he who is not ſatisfied with that, deſires farther evidence, rather from a diſpoſition of cavilling than a love of truth.

Laſtly, when we hear our bleſſed Saviour's anſwer to thoſe who told him of his mother and his brethren, let us endeavour to qualify ourſelves among thoſe whom Chriſt calls his deareſt relations—ſuch as do the will of God from their hearts.

SERMON XXI.

JOHN, v. 39.

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES; FOR IN THEM YE HAVE ETERNAL LIFE.

THE thirteenth chapter is throughout an explanation of the *progress of the gospel*; how it *would* be received, and how it *ought* to be received: pointing out, lastly, the happiness of those who did receive it, and the misery of those who rejected it. These several views of the gospel are given in parables. Our blessed Saviour chose this method of teaching—that they who were ill-disposed, might take no offence; and they who were well-disposed, might apply his parables to their own cases, and instruct themselves. In some of his parables he is plain and clear: they are taken from the most common objects. But others are more obscure: these,

too, have their uſe; for they may often be conſidered as propheſies; which afterwards, when fulfilled, tended certainly to confirm the truth of the goſpel.

The firſt parable is the celebrated one of the ſower. It repreſents the ſeveral different ways in which the goſpel ſhould be received by mankind; but the particulars of it, eſpecially with our Saviour's explication of them, are ſo eaſy, that I need not dwell upon them.

In the quotation which our Saviour makes from Iſaiah, there may be ſome difficulty. He tells his diſciples, that *in the Jews was fulfilled that propheſy—By hearing, ye ſhall hear and not underſtand; and ſeeing, ye ſhall ſee and ſhall not perceive: for the heart of this people is waxen groſs, and their ears dull of hearing, and their eyes they have cloſed; leſt at any time they ſhould ſee with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and ſhould underſtand with their heart, and be converted; and I ſhould heal them.* Now this, at firſt ſight, appears as if God Almighty purpoſely blinded the Jews, to prevent their ſeeing their true intereſt, and being converted. But it is very common in ſcripture, when God ſpeaks by his prophets, to ſpeak of a thing, as if ordered by him,

him, which would actually happen. So that the meaning of what the prophet ſays, is only that the Jews might harden their own hearts themſelves, in ſuch a way as would prevent their converſion.

Jeſus's next parable is that of the enemy, who ſowed tares among wheat; both which were ordered to grow together till harveſt, when they ſhould be ſeparated—the tares ſhould be burnt, and the wheat gathered into the barn. The meaning of this parable is very plain: it ſhews the ſtate of Chriſt's kingdom on earth. Good people and bad ſhall be mixed together, till the end of the world; when, as our Saviour explains it to his diſciples, the righteous ſhall *ſhine forth as the ſun in the kingdom of their Father*, while the wicked ſhall be *conſigned to wailing and gnaſhing of teeth.*

The next parable was to ſhew the ſurprizing quick progreſs of the goſpel. Like a grain of muſtard-ſeed, which is the leaſt of all ſeeds, and grows into one of the greateſt of plants, the goſpel ſhould, from a very ſmall beginning, ſpread widely in the world.

The next parable goes a little farther, and gives us to underſtand, that in time we may

hope it will ſpread over the whole face of the earth; as a little leaven, hid in a quantity of meal, in time leavens the whole.

The two next parables ſhew the great value of the goſpel. It is like treaſure hid in a field, which a man obtains by purchaſing that field at the expence of all he hath: or, it is like a pearl of great price, which a merchant heard of, and ſold all he had to purchaſe it.

The laſt parable which our Saviour ſpoke on this occaſion, was to ſhew the great end and concluſion of all things. A net ſhould be thrown in the ſea;—death ſhould ſweep all mankind to one ſhore: there they ſhould be ſeparated—the good gathered into veſſels, and the bad caſt away.

Jeſus then told his diſciples, that *every Scribe inſtructed unto the kingdom of God*, was like a prudent *houſeholder, who bringeth forth out of his treaſure things new and old;* that is, they who were to teach the goſpel ſhould imitate the prudent houſeholder: he knows how to ſet proper things before his ſeveral gueſts, ſuitable to their ſeveral degrees; ſo ſhould they who were teachers of the goſpel, know how to make particular application to all who were deſirous of inſtruction.

After this, we are told, Jeſus went to Nazareth, the town where he had been brought up; but the people, conſidering his low birth and mean relations, rather than his mighty power, took offence. From this unhappy unbelief his divine preſence among them had no effect.

In the beginning of the fourteenth chapter, we have the melancholy account of the death of John the Baptiſt; and the miracle of feeding the multitude with five loaves and two fiſhes.—After this, Jeſus ſent his diſciples on board a ſhip, while he diſmiſſed the multitude. In the night he went to them walking on the ſea.—There is ſcarce any of our Saviour's miracles, which is not intended to do good to man—at the ſame time, to ſhew his divine power; but this miracle ſeems chiefly intended to ſhew his power. Two things, however, may be ſaid to explain the propriety of it:—In the firſt place, it ſeemed to be a more convincing proof to the diſciples, than any they had yet ſeen, of their bleſſed Maſter's power over nature. *To tread on the waves of the ſea*, is mentioned by Job as an emblem of omnipotence.—Secondly, it was a ſtrong way of inſtructing them in faith. It was a common way among the Jews to inſtruct by actions as well as

words: as, when Agabus foretold the imprisonment of St. Paul, he took the apostle's girdle, and binding himself with it, *Thus*, said he, *shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the person to whom this girdle belongeth.* Jesus's calling Peter, therefore, to come to him on the water, was shewing him by *an action* the extent of his faith, and putting it to a test: as his faith failed, so he sank; and this was, no doubt, a *lesson* both to him and his fellow-disciples, which they would remember as long as they lived, as it was imprinted so strongly upon their memories by an *action*.

After this miracle, they soon landed in the country of Genneseret, where the inhabitants with great joy flocked about Jesus—saw his miracles, and believed in his doctrine. You remember, at the end of the eighth chapter, when Jesus healed the man who had the legion of devils which afterwards entered into the swine, that the inhabitants of the country were afraid of him, and desired him to depart out of their coasts; and that Jesus accordingly, seeing them so ill-disposed at that time to the gospel, returned over the lake; but left the man whom he had healed, to be a standing miracle among them of his divine power.—Now it is commonly supposed, that

that the country where Jeſus now landed was that ſame country; and that the people, now at length convinced of the greatneſs of his power, and probably by the very means which Jeſus uſed—of leaving the man among them—had taken this happy turn in favour of the goſpel.

The fifteenth chapter introduces the Scribes and Phariſees, finding fault with our bleſſed Saviour for his neglect of traditions. The caſe was this:—

You remember, in the twelfth chapter, how theſe wicked people aſcribed his caſting out devils to his being in league with the prince of the devils; and how Jeſus put them to ſilence, by ſhewing them the impoſſibility of any ſuch league. They found themſelves therefore quite confounded; and, for the preſent, left him.—Upon conſulting among themſelves, however, they afterwards reſolved to try another method of deſtroying his favour with the people. The Phariſees, you know, are all along repreſented in ſcripture as a very wicked ſet of people, and particularly as great hypocrites: their lives were bad, but ſtill they deſired to make a fair ſhew before men. *They devoured widows' houſes*, we are told; *but for a pretence made long prayers.*

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It was their cuſtom, therefore, to lay the ſtreſs on a great many outward performances, which were not written in the law, that the people might believe they were even more religious than God himſelf required. Theſe obſervances they called traditions, as if handed down to them from their law-giver, Moſes; and intended for the uſe of thoſe who wiſhed to be more particularly religious. All this the people believed; and revered the Phariſees, as men uncommonly righteous. If only two men went to heaven, they would ſay, a Scribe would be one, and a Phariſee the other. So entirely had theſe wicked people gained an aſcendant over the multitude!

Our Saviour inſtructed his diſciples in different notions of religion. Inſtead of laying the ſtreſs on forms and ceremonies, he enjoined the religion of the heart—pure affections, and a holy life.

Of this neglect of outward obſervances the Phariſees taking advantage, aſked Jeſus, why he ſuffered his diſciples to tranſgreſs the traditions of the elders; for they waſhed not their hands when they ate bread? It ſeems, this practice of waſhing their hands before a meal, was one of their holy traditions; for they ſaid, as food was ſanctified by prayer for the uſe of man, it ought not

not to be touched with unpurified hands. This abſurd attention to trifles, while they neglected things of conſequence, raiſed the indignation of Jeſus: he ſhewed them, that while they attempted to ſerve God by theſe ridiculous obſervances, they were living in diſobedience to ſome of his moſt important commands. Thus, ſaid he, God commands you to honour your father and mother; but ye ſay, *Whoſoever ſhall ſay to his father or mother, It is a gift by whatſoever thou mighteſt be profited by me, and honour not his father and mother, he ſhall be free.* In the temple of Jeruſalem were cheſts, in which people commonly put money to purchaſe ſacrifices and other things for the uſe of the temple. The Phariſees therefore, ſtill to make the people believe they were more than ordinarily zealous in the ſervice of God, uſed to ſay, that this way of laying out money was of all others the moſt proper; and therefore, if they put their money into theſe cheſts, it was the moſt pleaſing thing they could do to God, though their parents were ſtarving. It was the praiſe of men which they expected for their holineſs.—This hypocriſy our Saviour rebuked; and let them know, that when God gives a command, as he does to aſſiſt our parents

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at all times in their diſtreſs, it is highly diſpleaſing to him to have that command neglected for the ſake of any outward performances, in which his honour is much leſs concerned.

Jeſus then told the people, and afterwards explained it farther to his diſciples, that it was not meats and drinks, or any thing external, that defiled a man; but that all pollution came from within: it was the impurity of the heart, which was odious in the ſight of God. *Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, falſe-witneſs, blaſphemies: theſe are the things which defile a man; but to eat with unwaſhen hands defileth not a man.*

Jeſus afterwards, we are told, went into the parts of the country near Tyre and Sidon, which was a heathen country bordering upon Judea. Here one of the heathen inhabitants, a woman of Canaan, came to him, and deſired he would heal her daughter. Jeſus, willing to make trial of her faith for the glory of God, told her, that it was not right to *take the children's bread, and caſt it to dogs:* by which he meant, that as he was to preach the goſpel, and do miracles, only at firſt among the Jews, whom he calls *the children*, it could not be expected from him to take the

the *children's bread*—the doctrine designed for the Jews—and cast it to *dogs*, which was the common name given by the Jews to the heathen. The woman, entering entirely into his meaning, replied, *Truth, Lord; yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from the children's table:* as if she had said, It is very true, you may be sent principally to the Jews; but it can be no injury, as you are now at such a distance from them, to do a benefit to me.—This answer shewed plainly the woman's belief in Jesus as the Messiah; founded, most probably, on the many wonderful things she had heard of him. Jesus replied, *O woman, great is thy faith! be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole the self-same hour.*

This chapter (the fifteenth) concludes with an account of another miracle, like that in the last chapter, of feeding a multitude of people with a miraculous increase of provisions.

BEFORE we conclude, let us see what particular uses arise from what hath been chiefly explained.

The parable of the sower is full of instruction. It might be spread into a volume. The different ways

ways in which different men receive the goſpel; and the various deceits, by which we are aſſaulted both from within and without, are copious ſubjects. The great point is to conſider, that when we ſee (as it *ſeems* to appear in the parable before us) that three parts in four of mankind miſcarry in the great buſineſs for which we were ſent into this world, we cannot, if we are ſerious in theſe matters, be too much on our guard; nor too careful to make our hearts that good ſoil, which will produce fruit in abundance.—Nor ought we, again, to take offence at the goſpel, becauſe we find it neglected, and numbers fall from its purity: this, we ſee, is no more than our Saviour propheſied.

From the parables of the treaſure hid in a field, and of the pearl of great price, we are ſhewn the value of the goſpel, and that we ought to renounce all for its ſake.

From the parable of the enemy who ſowed tares among the wheat, we are ſhewn the great induſtry of the enemy of our ſouls; we are ſhewn from how ſmall a beginning miſchiefs ariſe—mere ſeeds, unobſerved at firſt; and we are ſhewn, laſtly, the great concluſion, what we are to expect, if we ſuffer ourſelves to be among the tares:

tares: *At the time of harveſt, I will ſay to the reapers, Gather ye together firſt the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them; but gather the wheat into my barn.*

The ſame great truth is delivered in the parable of the net caſt into the ſea, which gathered of every kind: the good were received into veſſels, but the bad were caſt away.

From the account given us of our Saviour's being rejected by thoſe of his own country, we are cautioned not to deſpiſe a bleſſing becauſe we have received it from our earlieſt youth.—Jeſus has been brought up, as it were, *among ſt us*, as among the people of Nazareth. We have known the goſpel from childhood. The commonneſs of a bleſſing is apt to make us deſpiſe it. Let us endeavour not to make ours one of thoſe countries, where a *prophet is without honour*.

Very different is the account we read, in the next chapter, of the people of Genneſeret, who received Chriſt with ſo much gladneſs. They had never ſeen him before, except once: but though they were frightened at firſt at the great miracle he had performed among them; yet, when they conſidered the effects of his divine

power,

power, their hearts were ſoftened, and they became converts to the goſpel.

When we ſee that warmth with which our Saviour ſpeaks againſt outward obſervances, let us examine our own hearts, and endeavour to find out, whether our religion is ſeated *there*; or whether, like the Phariſees, we lay the ſtreſs on trifling obſervances. If we hope that God will accept our going to church, for inſtance, or the ſacrament, though we are no way improved by either, in the room of a holy life, we ſhall find ourſelves deceived.—This is a leſſon which our Saviour often teaches, and therefore it ſhould make the more impreſſion.

The laſt piece of inſtruction we obtain from the ſcripture I have juſt explained, is, what we receive from the Phœnician woman. Her faith had little evidence in compariſon of ours; yet ſhe cried to Chriſt in her diſtreſs, and would not be put by her petition. May our earneſtneſs be rewarded as her's was; and may we all hear, as ſhe did, *Great is thy faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt!*

SERMON XXII.

JOHN, v. 39.

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES; FOR IN THEM YE HAVE ETERNAL LIFE.

IN the beginning of the ſixteenth chapter, the Phariſees and Sadducees (who agreed in nothing but in their hatred of Jeſus) came to him again, and deſired he would give them a ſign from heaven, to prove himſelf the Meſſiah. Moſes had brought manna, and Elijah had brought both fire and water from heaven, to prove themſelves from God; and ſomething of this kind was expected from him.

Jeſus's anſwer to their enquiry was this:—*When it is evening ye ſay, It will be fair weather, for the ſky is red; and in the morning, It will be foul weather to-day, for the ſky is red and lowering. O ye hypocrites! ye can diſcern the face of*

the ſky, but can ye not diſcern the ſigns of the times? The meaning of which is, that it was as eaſy for them to diſcern the marks and ſigns of the Meſſiah from the prophecies of the Old Teſtament, as it was to judge of the weather from the appearances of the ſky. If the proof from their own prophets could not ſatisfy them, no other proofs could. No other ſign therefore ſhould be given them, except what they found there; and particularly the ſign of the prophet Jonas:—His lying three days and three nights in the whale's belly, was a ſign which they ſhould hereafter ſee fulfilled.

After this, Jeſus paſſed over the lake; and in his paſſage took an opportunity to caution his diſciples againſt the hypocriſy of the Scribes and Phariſees, of which they had ſeen ſo late an inſtance. He called this hypocriſy by the name of *leaven*—an expreſſion which they miſunderſtood, ſuppoſing their Maſter had put them in mind of having forgotten to take proviſions. This want of faith Jeſus rebuked, by reminding them of the two miracles he had lately wrought, in relieving great multitudes of people by a ſmall quantity of bread. If he could provide for the neceſſities of ſo great a multitude by ſo trifling a proviſion,

proviſion, they ought certainly to have thought themſelves ſafe under his protection, though they *had* forgotten to take bread.

Jeſus, about this time, intending to give his diſciples a clearer view of his ſufferings and exaltation than they had yet conceived, began by aſking them, (as they had been preaching around the country,) what opinions men in general entertained of him? The diſciples told him, that ſome thought him John the Baptiſt, riſen from the dead; others thought he was Elijah the prophet; and many thought he was Jeremias. Jeſus then aſking them their own opinion about him, Peter, in the name of the reſt, declared his belief in him as the Son of God. Jeſus anſwered, *Bleſſed art thou, Simon Barjona* (that is, the ſon of Jona), *for fleſh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I ſay unto thee, that thou art Peter; and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell ſhall not prevail againſt it: and I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatſoever thou ſhalt bind on earth ſhall be bound in heaven; and whatſoever thou ſhalt looſe on earth, ſhall be looſed in heaven.*

This paſſage is the grand foundation of all the authority of the Pope. The papiſts ſay, that as our Saviour here calls St. Peter the rock on which he will build his church, and gives him the keys of the kingdom of heaven, by which he might admit, or exclude, whomſoever he pleaſed; ſo the Pope, ſucceeding St. Peter, as they affirm, of courſe had the ſame power. He therefore is the rock: he carries the keys; and he can, as St. Peter could, admit whomſoever he pleaſes into the kingdom of heaven, or exclude them from it.

I ſhall now ſhew you how all this boaſted power of the Pope is eaſily overturned, by explaining the paſſage in its natural and eaſy manner.

St. Peter had been making a confeſſion of his faith, that Jeſus Chriſt was the Meſſiah, the Son of God. On which, Jeſus turning to him, and alluding to his name, which ſignifies *a rock*, ſaid, on this rock—that is, on this great truth which thou haſt juſt now profeſſed, or, if you will, on thee and my other diſciples who publiſh this great truth—will I build my church. He then tells Peter, *he would give unto him the keys of the*

kingdom of heaven: and whatſoever he ſhould bind on earth, ſhould be bound in heaven; and whatſoever he ſhould looſe on earth, ſhould be looſed in heaven. Now, though it appears from St. Matthew as if this was ſaid only to Peter, yet it is evident from St. John, that it was ſaid equally to all the diſciples: *Whoſoever ſins ye remit,* ſays St. John, *they are remitted; and whoſoever ſins ye retain, they are retained.* And the meaning of the whole paſſage is only this:—It was a cuſtom among the Jews, when a perſon became a rabbi, or an expounder of the law, to put a key into his hand; inſtructing him thus, by an outward ſign, which I ſhewed you was a common method of inſtructing, that he was now qualified to unlock, or expound, the difficult paſſages of the law. To this cuſtom Jeſus ſeems to allude, (which appears, indeed, to be the whole meaning of the paſſage,) ſaying to his diſciples, in effect, thus:—I here give you that authority to expound the goſpel, which was given to the rabbies to expound the law, by the delivery of a key into their hands. Through the power therefore that ſhall be given you by the Holy Ghoſt, whatſoever you ſhall declare to

be my will on earth, with regard to the ſalvation of mankind, it ſhall be confirmed in heaven.

After the diſciples had made this confeſſion, that Jeſus was the Meſſiah, he orders them *to tell no man this great truth.* The reaſon of this I have hinted before:—Jeſus choſe that the world ſhould rather receive this great truth from his actions, than from any open profeſſion of his own. Thus, you remember, when John's diſciples came to him to enquire, whether he was the Chriſt, he does not make an open profeſſion, but works ſeveral miracles in their ſight; and bids them tell John *what they had ſeen and heard.* What they ſaw and heard was to be the great proof of his being the Meſſiah; and they who would not believe on this proof, would not certainly believe on any profeſſion that he could make.

Jeſus having obtained this confeſſion of faith from his diſciples, now puts it to the teſt; and tells them, that *he muſt go up to Jeruſalem, and ſuffer many things of the elders, and chief prieſts, and ſcribes, and be put to death; but that he ſhould riſe again on the third day.* This was a greater ſhock to their new-eſtabliſhed faith, than

it

it was able to bear; and Peter, whoſe forward zeal generally ſpoke for the reſt, expreſſed his great diſlike to what his Maſter had ſaid. This drew upon him a ſevere rebuke from Jeſus; implying that his mind ſtill ran upon worldly things, and had not yet gained a juſt idea of the Meſſiah's kingdom. There ſeems to be ſomething more than ordinarily ſevere in Jeſus's rebuke—*Get thee behind me, Satan.* But the word *Satan* does not here mean, as we commonly uſe it, the *devil;* but an *adverſary*, or an *oppoſer*, as St. Peter was in that inſtance to the great ſcheme of the goſpel. Jeſus then told his diſciples, that they, as well as he, muſt expect bad treatment from the world; and that whoever was truly his diſciple, muſt take up his croſs and follow him—that is, he muſt be prepared to give up all, if he ſhould be called upon, for the ſake of his religion. Jeſus concluded his diſcourſe with telling his diſciples, *There were ſome ſtanding there, who ſhould not taſte of death till they ſhould ſee the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.*

Of this paſſage there are ſeveral ſenſes given; but I think the beſt is, that notwithſtanding the Meſſiah's kingdom, or the eſtabliſhment of chriſtianity, may ſeem at ſuch a diſtance, yet in that

very generation, notwithſtanding the evils with which its profeſſors were threatened, it ſhould be extended very widely. You ſee this ſenſe joins it naturally with what went before. Jeſus was telling his diſciples, they muſt ſuffer for the ſake of their religion; but notwithſtanding that, he here tells them, they ſhould have the happineſs to ſee their religion increaſe more and more.

Jeſus, having given his diſciples this view of his ſufferings, thought it proper to give them alſo a foretaſte of his glory; an account of which is related at the beginning of the ſeventeenth chapter. The viſion of his *transfiguration*, as it is called, was ſhewn only to Peter, James, and John, who were forbidden to ſpeak of it till after his reſurrection: but it does not appear, nor is it likely, that Jeſus meant to conceal it from the reſt of his diſciples.

As they deſcended the mountain, which had been the ſcene of this glorious viſion, they found a number of people gathering about the diſciples, among whom was a man who had brought his ſon, a demoniac, to be healed; but the diſciples were not able to heal him. After Jeſus had performed the miracle, the diſciples aſked him, why

why they could not perform it? Jeſus told them, becauſe of their unbelief. *If ye had faith*, ſaid he, *as a grain of muſtard-ſeed, ye might ſay to that mountain, Remove hence, and it ſhould be removed; and nothing ſhould be impoſſible to you. To remove a mountain*, was a proverb among the Jews for doing ſomething exceedingly great; and thus St. Paul uſes it in the thirteenth chapter of the Firſt of Corinthians: *Though I had all faith, ſo that I could remove mountains.* The paſſage therefore means only, that if they had had ſufficient faith, they might have performed this, and other great miracles.

The ſeventeenth chapter concludes with an account of Jeſus's paying the tribute-money.—This *tribute-money*, as it is here called, was money collected for the ſervice of the temple. When Jeſus ſaid, therefore, that *the children are free*, he means, that as the temple is God's houſe, and he the Son of God, he might for that reaſon have been excuſed.

In the beginning of the eighteenth chapter, the diſciples, who had not yet gotten juſt notions of the Meſſiah's kingdom, began to diſpute among themſelves, *who ſhould be greateſt in the kingdom of heaven*; by which they meant ſome king-

kingdom of this world, which Jeſus, as they ſtill imagined, was about to eſtabliſh. This diſpute Jeſus ſettled by placing a little child before them, and telling them, no one could be eminent in his kingdom, who did not bring down all his ambitious thoughts to the innocence of that pattern.

In the fifth verſe of this chapter our Saviour ſays, *that whoſo receiveth one ſuch little child in my name, receiveth me;* that is, whoſo receiveth and inſtructeth ſuch innocent people as theſe, does the moſt acceptable thing to God. But he who offends one of theſe little ones; that is, he who miſleads or perſecutes them, cannot do any thing ſo offenſive to him: *For I ſay unto you, that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father, which is in heaven.* The meaning of which expreſſion may either be, that the bleſſed inhabitants of heaven are compoſed of the ſouls of ſuch innocent perſons; or, that ſuch perſons are under the peculiar care of God's holy angels, agreeable to that paſſage of St. Paul, in which he ſpeaks *of miniſtering ſpirits, ſent forth to miniſter to them that are heirs of ſalvation.*

Jeſus then gives his diſciples inſtructions about the forgiveneſs of injuries, which he conveys in that

that beautiful parable of the ſervant who demanded a trifling debt of his fellow-ſervant, though he himſelf had been forgiven an immenſe ſum. To ſet this matter in its true light, it may not be amiſs to tell you, that ten thouſand talents amount to ſeveral millions of our pounds; and that one hundred pence (ſuppoſing each penny to be a Roman penny, worth about ſeven pence) does not amount to more than about three pounds. This certainly ſhews what our Saviour's opinion was, of the difference between thoſe offences which we commit againſt God, and thoſe which we commit againſt each other.

In the beginning of the nineteenth chapter, we find the Phariſees tempting Jeſus with a new queſtion—*Whether it was lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cauſe?* The deceitfulneſs of the queſtion lay in this;—that as Jeſus had often ſpoken againſt divorces for trifling cauſes, he would be reduced either to deny his own doctrine, or to contradict the law of Moſes, which gave great liberty in matters of divorce. Jeſus, in anſwer, put them in mind of a law earlier than that of Moſes—the law of God at the creation of the world, when man and woman were joined together; which union, he added,

except

except on the account of adultery, it was not lawful to diſſolve.

We have next the account of the young man, who came to Jeſus to know what he was to do to obtain eternal life. Jeſus put his religion to the teſt. But it ſoon appeared, that although he pretended to have ſo great a regard for religion, the world had his heart; and that, as he could not keep his religion and his riches together, he was determined at no rate to part with his riches. Jeſus then obſerved, *that it was eaſier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven.* It was agreeable to the Jewiſh manner of ſpeaking, to expreſs a difficult thing by an impoſſibility. The meaning is, that if men liſten merely to the dictates of human nature, the world will always miſlead them; but if they liſten to the ſuggeſtions of the Holy Spirit, it will be in their power to conquer all temptations.

On Peter's obſerving, that they had forſaken all to follow him, Jeſus replied, that when the Son of Man ſhould ſit on the throne of his glory, *they alſo ſhould ſit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Iſrael.* This expreſſion ſeems only, in the Jewiſh way of ſpeaking, to imply, that

that they who gave up the world for their religion, ſhould be proportionally rewarded. But that the apoſtles themſelves were to be judges, and not to be judged, is not at all agreeable to the common tenor of ſcripture; which ſeems every where to aſſert, that all muſt appear before the judgment-ſeat of Chriſt. And St. Paul himſelf ſays, that *he that judgeth me is the Lord.*

LET us now review, before I conclude, ſome of the more ſtriking paſſages which have been explained.

From our Saviour's refuſing to give the Phariſees a ſign, let us not tempt God by requiring more evidence in proof of our religion than he hath thought proper to give.

From the diſtreſs of the diſciples on having forgotten to take bread, let us learn to depend on God for our proviſion in this world. We may ſafely truſt ourſelves in the hands of that omnipotent Power, who could feed five thouſand people with five barley loaves.

From Jeſus's informing his diſciples they muſt have their time of ſuffering, as all chriſtians, more or leſs, muſt expect, let us lay our account for theſe things, and prepare ourſelves for them;

whether God Almighty means to lay them upon us in the way of poverty, or ſickneſs, or any other calamity: let us raiſe ourſelves above them by conſidering the glories of another world; of which our Saviour, in his transfiguration, hath given us a foretaſte. Let us conſider how loſing a bargain it would be, to gain the whole world, and loſe our own ſouls; or what recompence could be given us in exchange for our ſouls?

From our Saviour's ſetting up little children as patterns to thoſe who wiſh to enter into the kingdom of heaven, let us endeavour to cultivate in our minds that ſimplicity—that modeſty—that innocence of manners, of which a little child is ſo beautiful a pattern.

When Chriſt ſpeaks of marriage as of a ſacred bond, let thoſe who are engaged in that union, endeavour to make it, as much as they can, a ſtate of happineſs. It is not only the horrid crime of adultery which is to be avoided, but every inſtance of unkindneſs which tends to make the married ſtate unhappy.

When our Saviour ſays, *Where one or two are gathered together, there am I in the midſt of them,* we have a ſtrong argument in favour of public worſhip; which we ſhould, at no time, be tempted

tempted to neglect, when it is in our power to attend it.

In the parable of the ſervant who treated his fellow with ſo much harſhneſs, notwithſtanding the great debt from which he had been ſo kindly releaſed himſelf, we ſee the duty of forgiving one another, placed in a very ſtrong light:—*His lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors: ſo likewiſe ſhall my heavenly Father do unto you, if ye, from your hearts, forgive not every one his brother their treſpaſſes.*

The laſt paſſage relates to the ſtory of the young man, who came to Jeſus to enquire what he was to do to inherit eternal life. Jeſus had been telling his diſciples, how unprofitable it would be for a man to gain the whole world and loſe his own ſoul; and here, in the ſucceeding chapter, we find this leſſon exemplified:—Here is a perſon, who might have learned the way to everlaſting life from the great Author himſelf of everlaſting life; but the things of this world miſled him. He went away ſorrowful; for he had great poſſeſſions.—At the ſame time, my brethren, do not ſuppoſe that great poſſeſſions alone are what fix our hearts on this world: little poſſeſſions are as liable to miſlead us; and we

we ſee juſt as little religion among the lower ranks of people, as among the higher.—Let us then all examine our own hearts, and endeavour, as far as we can, to ſet our affections on things above, rather than on the things of this world; aſſuring ourſelves, that if we do we have Chriſt's promiſe to *receive an hundred fold in this world, and, in the world to come, everlaſting life.*

SERMON XXIII.

JOHN, v. 39.

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES; FOR IN THEM YE HAVE ETERNAL LIFE.

THE nineteenth chapter ended with this obſervation: *Many that are firſt ſhall be laſt, and the laſt firſt.* This was chiefly meant with regard to the Jews and Gentiles. Many of the Jews, who were God's favoured people under the law, ſhould be among the laſt who would receive the goſpel; while many of the Gentiles ſhould be among the firſt. The twentieth chapter, therefore, ſhould not have been ſeparated from the nineteenth; for the parable of the labourers hired into the vineyard, with which this chapter begins, is an explanation of what our Saviour ſays with regard to thoſe who ſhall be *firſt*, and thoſe who ſhall be *laſt*. They who

were hired firſt were the Jews, who murmured againſt the good man of the houſe—that is, againſt God Almighty, becauſe he had made thoſe who were hired at the eleventh hour—that is, the Gentiles, equal with them.

Jeſus was now on his journey to Jeruſalem, where he was to ſuffer death. He had already, as was obſerved in my laſt diſcourſe, been preparing his diſciples for this great event; and he now thought it proper to mention it again, adding, by way of comfort to them, that on the third day he would riſe again from the dead. But they did not well underſtand what he meant; and ſtill imagined his riſing from the dead was ſome ſtate of worldly grandeur.

On an occaſion of this kind, the mother of Zebedee's children came to him, requeſting for her two ſons the places of chief eminence in his kingdom. Jeſus aſked them, if they were able *to drink of the cup that he was to drink of, and be baptized with the baptiſm that he was baptized with?*—that is, were they able to ſuffer death for the ſake of their religion? or any other worldly diſtreſs which it might bring upon them? This was the point they ſhould firſt conſider—not the reward, but the means of obtaining that reward.

reward. He then tells them, that although they might be able to go through a ſtate of trial for the ſake of their religion, yet ſtill places of eminence in his kingdom were not conferred, as they ſeemed to imagine, by favour or affection; but ſhould be given to thoſe who ſhould the moſt properly prepare themſelves for them.

At this requeſt of the two ſons of Zebedee the reſt of the diſciples taking offence, Jeſus told them, that the princes of the Gentiles exerciſed dominion; but that it ſhould not be ſo among them: inſtead of that pride which the princes of the world aſſumed, they ſhould be content with that ſtation in life which God had allotted them; and ſhould aim at eminent places in Chriſt's kingdom, not by pride and ambition, but by humility and condeſcenſion.

In the beginning of the next chapter, we have firſt our Saviour's triumphant entry into Jeruſalem. Hitherto, every thing he had done had been done with quietneſs and caution. When he performed a miracle, he forbade it to be mentioned: when his diſciples acknowledged him to be the Meſſiah, he bade them tell no man of it: but now, in the moſt open manner, he takes upon himſelf the completion of that remarkable

prophecy, which the Jews always applied to the Meſſiah: *Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold thy King cometh to thee meek and lowly, and ſitting on an aſs.* The cauſe of this difference in the behaviour of Jeſus ſeems to be this:—Hitherto, till his miniſtry was completed, he choſe not to give offence, nor raiſe the malice of his enemies. He might at any time, indeed, have ſecured himſelf from their malice by a miracle; but he choſe rather to avoid it by prudence. Chriſt's avoiding danger by a miracle, would have been no example to the future profeſſors of the goſpel; but to ſee him avoid it by caution and inoffenſive behaviour, was an example worth their imitation. But now his miniſtry was completed, all farther reſerve was unneceſſary. He was about to fall into the hands of his enemies, and he did not now wiſh to avoid them.—Beſides, it was his deſire that his death might be as public as poſſible. He therefore entered Jeruſalem at a time of the greateſt reſort, and in the moſt open manner, that the attention of all men might be excited, and that all might witneſs his death and reſurrection.—The word *Hoſanna* ſignifies, *Save, we beſeech thee;* and the Jews always applied it to the Meſſiah. At the feaſt of Tabernacles,

particularly, it was uſual for them to repeat it as they went in proceſſion, and carried palm branches in their hands. The people's applying it therefore to our Saviour, ſhews the general ſenſe they entertained of him.

On entering the temple, his firſt work was to drive the buyers and ſellers from its courts. Theſe people carried on a traffic with a view to furniſh ſacrifices for the temple-ſervice, and to exchange different pieces of foreign money, for the advantage of thoſe who came from foreign parts to worſhip at Jeruſalem. All this was very well; but neither was the place proper in which this trade was carried on, nor was it carried on with that honeſty and fairneſs with which every buſineſs ought to be carried on, eſpecially ſuch buſineſs as related to the worſhip of God: inſtead of being fair merchants, they were a den of thieves. For theſe reaſons, Jeſus thought proper to drive them from the courts of the temple. It does not, however, appear that this was done in any miraculous manner: he was at this time attended with ſuch a multitude of people, who brought him in triumph into Jeruſalem, that it might not appear ſafe for the traders to make any oppo-

ſition; though I ſhould rather attribute their confuſion to the awe of his preſence.

This act of authority rouſed the chief prieſts and rulers, who immediately began an oppoſition. They firſt came to him, demanding by what authority he did theſe things? Jeſus told them, he would firſt aſk them a queſtion: *The baptiſm of John*, ſaid he, *whence was it?—from heaven, or of man?* Now the force of the queſtion lay in this;—that whatever John's authority was, Jeſus's was the ſame. So that, in fact, this queſtion was an anſwer to theirs. The chief prieſts, however, though they were convinced that John's authority was from heaven, yet they did not care to own it. On the other hand, they durſt not ſay his authority was from men, becauſe of the people, who all thought John was a prophet. They anſwered, therefore, they could not tell.

This led Jeſus to inſtruct them by the parable of the man who had two ſons, whom he ordered to work in his vineyard. The elder at firſt pretended he would go, but afterwards refuſed; the younger was obſtinate at firſt, but afterwards went.—In this parable Jeſus ſhewed the chief prieſts

prieſts the ſtate of the Jews and Gentiles:—The Jews were the elder ſon: they at firſt pretended to be obedient to God, but afterwards revolted from him. The Gentiles were the younger ſon; who were at firſt diſobedient, while they were heathen; but afterwards, being convinced by the goſpel, they obeyed it.

To this parable Jeſus added another, which ſtill carried the truth more home. It was the parable of the houſeholder and his vineyard:—He let it out to huſbandmen, who ill-treated his ſervants whom he ſent for the fruits of it; and, when he laſtly ſent his ſon, they put him to death. This was bringing the caſe ſo home to the Jews, who had put the prophets to death, and ſhould ſoon put the Son of God himſelf to death alſo, that they could not miſtake the tendency of it.—Jeſus was now, you obſerve, quite free from reſtraint: he was at Jeruſalem, and about to ſuffer death; ſo that he had no occaſion for that caution which he had hitherto ſhewn. He told the Jews plainly, therefore, that *the kingdom of heaven ſhould be taken from them, and given to a nation that ſhould bring forth the fruits thereof.* He now alſo told them plainly, that he was the corner-ſtone, which they had rejected; and that,

on whomſoever that ſtone ſhould fall, it ſhould grind him to powder.—But though the Phariſees ſought to lay hands on him, they durſt not do it openly, for fear of the multitude, who univerſally revered Jeſus as a prophet.

On another occaſion, as he was teaching in the temple, he reproved the Scribes and Phariſees, by the parable of the king, who made a marriage for his ſon, and invited gueſts, who refuſed to come. The king then ſent out his ſervants to gather gueſts from the highways and hedges. Theſe repreſented the Gentiles, who came to the marriage-feaſt, which the Jews had rejected.—But as our Saviour's parables carry often a double inſtruction, the Gentiles, too, are taught not to expect ſalvation, unleſs they put on the wedding-garment—that is, unleſs they led lives worthy of that faith in Chriſt which they had profeſſed.

We have next an account of the Phariſees' enſnaring queſtion about tribute-money. The difficulty of the queſtion lay in this:—As the Jews were deſcendants of Abraham, they conſidered themſelves as a free people, who ought to pay tribute to no foreign power; though they were at this very time in ſubjection to the Romans,

Romans. If therefore Jeſus ſhould ſay, they ought to pay tribute, he would offend the Jews; and if he ſaid they ought not to pay tribute, he would offend the Romans. With great wiſdom he evaded the queſtion, by aſking to ſee the tribute-money; and as it was ſtamped with Cæſar's head and inſcription, he bade them give to Cæſar what belonged to Cæſar, and to God what belonged to God.

The next queſtion put to him, was by the Sadducees, who denied a reſurrection, and thought they ſhould enſnare him by the caſe of a woman who had had ſeven huſbands:—They deſired therefore to know, which of them was to be her huſband after the reſurrection? This queſtion Jeſus eaſily decided, by telling them they entertained falſe conceptions of the next world; the ſtate of which was not to be upheld, like that of this world, by marriage.

Jeſus having put the Scribes and Phariſees to ſilence, began to tell the people plainly what kind of teachers they were. As they ſat in Moſes's ſeat—that is, as they expounded the law of Moſes, their inſtructions might often be good; but though they laid down the law with exact-

neſs

neſs to others, they paid little attention to it themſelves; their chief end was to gain the praiſe of men: they *made broad their phylacteries, and enlarged the borders of their garments, entirely with a deſign to gain glory from men.* The phylactery was a piece of parchment with a ſentence of ſcripture written upon it, which they put on the front of their caps; and the *borders of their garments* were a kind of fringe, which was ordered by the law. The Phariſees, therefore, made their phylacteries and their fringes broader than other people, that they might ſeem more religious.—Jeſus then pronounces ſeveral woes againſt them, for neither entering the kingdom of heaven themſelves, nor ſuffering others to enter—for devouring widows' houſes, and for a pretence making long prayers—for making proſelytes, and drawing others to be as wicked as themſelves—for their ſtrange uſe of oaths—for their exactneſs in trifling matters, and neglect of things of conſequence—for their preſerving a fair outſide, but being within full of all corruption.

Our Saviour having pronounced a woe againſt the Phariſees, pronounced next a woe over the city of Jeruſalem; which, for all its ſins, he pro-

pheſied,

phefied, ſhould ſpeedily be deſtroyed—a prophecy which, within the ſpace of thirty years after, was dreadfully fulfilled.

Now theſe denunciations of God's wrath againſt the Phariſees, and againſt the city of Jeruſalem, muſt not be conſidered as matter of imitation to us. Chriſt knew the hearts of men, which we do not; and beſides, acted as a prophet of God, denouncing thoſe woes againſt wickedneſs, which God in his eternal juſtice decrees.—With theſe woes the twenty-third chapter of St. Matthew ends.——Let us now review what hath been explained,

THE parable of the labourers hired into their maſter's vineyard, may be conſidered in two lights—a public, and a private one. Conſidered in its public light, we learn from it that all mankind are equally accepted under the goſpel. As Jews and Gentiles were equally accepted then, ſo all mankind are equally accepted now.—As addreſſed to private perſons, we learn from it, that God conſiders all Chriſtians as called, as ſoon as they have opportunities of knowing the truth. Some have endeavoured to find out in it an excuſe for a late repentance. God accepted him

him who entered the vineyard at a late hour, as readily as him who entered it early. It is true he did; but you will recollect the reaſon: it was, becauſe *no man had hired them.* If they had ſtood idle in the market-place, after they had been called, they would not certainly have been accepted.

From the requeſt made by the mother of Zebedee's children, let us endeavour to gain juſt notions of Chriſt's kingdom. It is no mark of Chriſt's favour, to have an eminent ſtation in this world: all ſtations here are only means of trial; and it is a comfortable thought to thoſe who are in the loweſt ſtations, that if they lead good and faithful lives, they will be rewarded hereafter, as much as thoſe who have been equally good in the higheſt ſtations. This paſſage of ſcripture, therefore, ought to be a warning to all Chriſtians not to ſuffer thoughts of power and ambition to riſe in their hearts; but to be ſatisfied with ſuch humble things as God appoints them; and be ready to bear their croſs whenever he lays it on them.

With regard to our Saviour's parables relating to the call of the Gentiles, and the woes againſt the Phariſees and Jeruſalem, they are among the ſtrongeſt

ſtrongeſt proofs of the truth of the goſpel. We, among other Gentiles, have been called to the knowledge of the grace of God; while Jeruſalem, as our Saviour propheſied, was entirely deſtroyed, and the Jews became a wandering people without any ſettlement, as they are at this day.—Yet we Gentiles muſt not be too ſecure. They who come to Chriſt's feaſt without a wedding-garment—that is, if they are Chriſtians only in name, they muſt conſider, that God will not only puniſh thoſe who obſtinately reject the goſpel, but thoſe alſo who pretend to receive it, and do not live up to it—ſuch people as, like the Phariſees, corrupt others, and make them more the children of hell than themſelves—ſuch as make light of oaths, and draw others into the vice of ſwearing by their example—ſuch as are exact in little forms and ceremonies, but careleſs in the duties they owe to God and man; and, laſtly, ſuch as are ſtrict and formal in their outſide behaviour, while their ſecret thoughts and intentions, like whited ſepulchres, are full of all corruption and uncleanneſs.

SERMON XXIV.

JOHN, v. 39.

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES; FOR IN THEM YE HAVE ETERNAL LIFE.

IN the beginning of the twenty-fourth chapter, Jeſus led his diſciples from Jeruſalem to the Mount of Olives, where they generally retired every evening. They ſat in full view of the city and temple, which ſtood on an oppoſite hill, and made a moſt magnificent appearance. The diſciples, ſtruck with what Jeſus had juſt ſaid of the ruin of the city, aſked him, what would be the ſign of his coming, and of the end of the world? There is ſome difficulty in aſcertaining what the diſciples meant by this queſtion. As their queſtion was put juſt after Jeſus had been lamenting over the city, it is rather probable it had reference to that event. Our Saviour, in his anſwer, plainly

plainly refers them to it; but at the ſame time enlarging the view, he ſeems to underſtand the latter part of their queſtion, in a literal ſenſe, as if they really enquired when the world ſhould have an end.

In the firſt place, he ſpeaks of wars, and famines, and earthquakes, which he calls the beginnings of ſorrow; and it is certain that all theſe calamities preceded the ruin of Jeruſalem. He orders his diſciples alſo not to be led away by deceivers; and we find that many deceivers did at that time pretend to deliver the people from the Romans, whom they only the more incenſed. Jeſus then inſtructs them, that when they ſhould ſee theſe ſigns, they ſhould leave Jeruſalem, and fly to other places for ſhelter.—In obedience to this command, we find, that a little before the city was beſieged, the Chriſtians that were in it fled to other places for refuge, and eſcaped the calamity.——In this part of our Saviour's diſcourſe there is a difficulty: *For as the lightning*, ſaith he, *cometh out of the eaſt, and ſhineth even to the weſt, ſo ſhall the coming of the Son of Man be; for whereſoever the carcaſe is, there will the eagles be gathered together.* By the lightning ſhining from one part of heaven to another,

another, our Saviour ſeems to ſhew how rapidly the chriſtian religion ſhould be propagated. He had been talking of deceivers and falſe Chriſts; and, in oppoſition to them, ſhews the power of the goſpel from its ſpeedy propagation.—The other expreſſion—*where the carcaſe is, there will the eagles be gathered together*—is a difficulty. Some ſuppoſe, by the carcaſe is meant the city of Jeruſalem; and by the eagles, the Roman army, which bore an eagle for their ſtandard. But it ſeems rather probable that the expreſſion is a Jewiſh proverb, and means only, that wherever the wicked are, not only in Jeruſalem but in any other place, there the hand of God ſhould find them, and puniſh them.

Our Saviour next ſpeaks of the ſun's being darkened, the moon not giving its light, the ſtars falling from heaven, and the powers of heaven being ſhaken. Now theſe expreſſions are often uſed by Jewiſh writers to denote the fall of nations; and here they ſeem to denote, what Jeſus had juſt been diſcourſing upon, the calamity which was to befal Jeruſalem.

Thus far then ſeems to relate to Jeruſalem. Our Saviour then takes up the queſtion in a more extended view, and ſeems to anſwer that

part

part of it which related to the end of the world. From one great event—the deſtruction of Jeruſalem, he ſeems to proceed to another—the end of all things; when God ſhould ſend *his angels, and gather the elect*—that is, his holy ſervants—*from one end of the earth to the other.* He then ſpeaks of the uncertainty of the time, which may be underſtood either of the end of the world, or of every man's death, which, to him, is the end of the world. This he compares to the days of Noah; when men, utterly inattentive to the great event which was coming upon them, careleſsly purſued their ſeveral employments, till the flood came ſuddenly and ſwept them away.—This great leſſon our Saviour concludes with an exhortation to watch, and be always on our guard, as we know not the time when it may pleaſe God to call us. The faithful ſervant will always be ready, and ſhall as ſurely be rewarded; while the unfaithful one, inattentive to his great concern, ſhall find himſelf unprepared when his Maſter calls, and be puniſhed for his wilful neglect.

In the beginning of the twenty-fifth chapter the ſame ſubject—the neceſſity of watching, and being always on our guard—is placed in another

light; and explained, in the parable of the ten virgins, in a very pleaſing manner. The wiſe virgins were ready when the bridegroom came, and entered into the marriage-chamber. Theſe repreſent ſuch good people as are always ready to meet death, however ſuddenly called: while the fooliſh virgins are thoſe who are unprepared, and thrown into confuſion when their hour approaches.

Our Saviour having thus inſtructed his diſciples to watch, and be always on their guard, for their encouragement adds the parable of the maſter who gave money into the hands of his ſervants to trade with. From this parable it appears, that they who do their beſt, whatever their talents are, ſhall be equally rewarded. He who improved ten talents, and he who equally improved five, entered alike into their maſter's joy. In St. Luke the ſame idea is given, by repreſenting different people trading with the ſame ſum; and as they more or leſs improved it, they were differently rewarded; one with ten cities, another with five.—Our Saviour concludes his divine diſcourſe by a ſort of deſcriptive view of the laſt judgment; from which it appears for what kind of works we ſhall be rewarded—all

of

of them works of charity. It muſt be ſuppoſed, however, though it is not expreſſed, that theſe works proceed from faith, and a good motive.

There is a difficulty in the thirty-fourth verſe of this chapter, in which the bleſſed are told, they ſhall receive the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world: as if God Almighty had prepared a kingdom for ſome, which was denied to others. But the words can mean only, that a kingdom was prepared for thoſe who ſhould do ſuch works as ſhould pleaſe God.

The next chapter is full of many events. We have, firſt, the conſultation of the chief prieſts againſt Jeſus, and their reſolutions to put off their deſigns againſt him at the time of the paſſover, as they feared the multitude then aſſembled might riſe in his favour; but in this there is nothing difficult, nor in the anointing his head as he ſat at meat.—At the fourteenth verſe, Judas's treaſon is related; and as he had promiſed to betray his Maſter in the night, when there could be nothing to fear from the tumult of the people, the chief prieſts changed their deſign of waiting till after the paſſover, and reſolved to take Jeſus immediately.

An account of the paſſover is next given, and of the inſtitution of the laſt ſupper. There is ſome difficulty in our Saviour's ſaying, *I will not drink henceforth of the fruit of the vine, until that day that I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.* The beſt interpretation which I know of theſe words is this:—Wine was uſed among the Jews in the celebration of the paſſover, to which Jeſus's words ſeem to refer. As if he had ſaid, wine ſhall not be drunk by me—that is, by my diſciples—on the occaſion of a Jewiſh feſtival any more, but ſhall be changed into a new inſtitution in my Father's kingdom—that is, in the kingdom of Chriſt, which God had eſtabliſhed. —After this follows the zealous profeſſion of St. Peter, and our Saviour's warning to him. Jeſus's agony in the garden ſucceeds, where he was ſeized by the officers of the chief prieſts. There is ſome difficulty in the expreſſion, *that all they who take the ſword ſhall periſh by the ſword.* It is commonly interpreted, that all they who reſiſt lawful authority ſhall lay themſelves open to the penalty which the ſword inflicts.

Jeſus's trial is next related. The words *guilty of death* mean, is ſo guilty as to deſerve death. Peter's denial is next related, and our Saviour's

trial before Pontius Pilate. As the Jews were under the government of the Romans, they could not themſelves condemn a criminal to death. The reaſon why Pontius Pilate condemned Jeſus, though he believed him innocent, was this:—It was common for a governor, when he left his province, to be accuſed to the emperor of bad adminiſtration, who was always ready to liſten to ſuch accuſations, as they brought money into his treaſury. Pilate therefore fearing this, was willing to gain the favour of the Jews, though at the expence of an innocent perſon.

When Jeſus was crucified, it was ſaid, the thieves who were crucified with him reviled him. But from St. Luke's account it appears, that only one of the thieves reviled him, for the other was penitent. But the writers of the New Teſtament, where no doctrine is concerned, in which no doubt they were guided by the ſpirit of truth, were not very exact in matters of leſs conſequence. And indeed nothing more ſhews their truth than this; for if they had agreed in every minute particular, people would be apt to ſay, they wrote their ſeveral goſpels by agreement together.

The vail of the temple, which rent at our Saviour's death, was a curtain which was hung up before a part of the temple, where nobody but the high prieſt was allowed to enter. Its being now rent, was a ſign that all mankind, as well as the Jews, were now called to the bleſſings of the goſpel. This whole awful tranſaction concludes with an account of our Saviour's reſurrection, in the relation of which there is no difficulty.

I HAVE now, my brethren, gone over, in ſeveral diſcourſes, the principal parts of the goſpel of St. Matthew; and have endeavoured to make as plain to you as I poſſibly could, ſuch difficulties in it as have chiefly occurred.—What remains from the whole, is, that each of us ſhould conſider the holy life, and holy precepts, of our bleſſed Redeemer, as our ſureſt guides to everlaſting happineſs. As to difficulties, they are of leſs importance. Many myſterious truths there are in ſcripture, which are above our reaſon to comprehend: ſuch are the nature of the bleſſed Trinity—the manner in which the death of Chriſt atones for the ſins of the world—the nature of a future

a future ſtate of rewards and puniſhments; and ſome others. Theſe we muſt take on the authority of ſcripture, juſt as we there receive them. We meddle not farther with them. Such difficulties, however, as are more obvious, and tend to explain ſcripture, ſuch as in the foregoing diſcourſes I have brought before you, may properly be the objects of our attention. Still, however, the grand points in which we are moſt intereſted, ſhould be—a holy life, derived from faith; the aſſiſtance of God's Holy Spirit, to be obtained by prayer; and the hope of pardon, through the merits of a Saviour. On theſe great points, we ſhould particularly dwell; and thank God for the information he has given us of them in the ſcriptures.

SERMON XXV.

JOHN, vi. 68.

WHITHER SHALL WE GO? THOU HAST THE WORDS OF ETERNAL LIFE.

OUR bleſſed Saviour had been diſcourſing upon ſome of the ſublime truths of the goſpel; which his ordinary hearers, blinded with the prejudices of the world, could not comprehend. They were *hard ſayings*, they ſaid, who could hear them? And their remark was juſt; for the *prejudices of the world*, and the *truths of religion*, never agree together. In the end, theſe cool diſciples left their Maſter; and liſtened no longer to one whom they thought ſo ſevere an inſtructor. Jeſus obſerving this, turned to the twelve, and ſaid, will ye alſo go away? The text is the zealous anſwer of St. Peter: *Lord, whither ſhall we go? Thou haſt the words of eternal*

eternal life. Whatever pretences the world may make—whatever allurements it may hold out, we are aſſured they are all falſe; and that nothing can be depended on but the truths of the goſpel.

Having thus opened the general meaning of the text, let me now examine it more at large. It contains a *queſtion* and an *anſwer.* The queſtion is, *Whither ſhall we go?*—what guides ſhall we follow?—what ſteps ſhall we take, to ſecure our happineſs? The anſwer refers us to the *words of eternal life.*

Let us firſt examine the queſtion, *Whither ſhall we go?*

It is certainly, of all queſtions that can be put to man, one of the moſt important; as happineſs is the grand point we are all in queſt of. In anſwering it, let us firſt examine the various pretences which the world ſets up as guides to happineſs. Nothing indeed can *promiſe* fairer: its pleaſures—its riches—its ambitious ſchemes, and worldly wiſdom, are all diſplayed before the eye, and furniſh various temptations, ſuited to every age, and every diſpoſition. When the wandering mind therefore aſks, Whither ſhall we go in ſearch of happineſs? what can be more plauſible

plauſible than that long train of enjoyment which the world holds out? Whither ſhall you go?—Go to the pleaſures of ſenſe. Theſe things are ſuited to you, and you to them: they cannot fail of making you happy.—Or, if theſe begin to loſe their reliſh, ſeek the happineſs that ariſes from riches; or follow the call of ambition and power.—And, indeed, theſe deluſions are generally ſtrong enough to engage the greateſt part of the world.

Yet one would think, that in a ſober hour their beſt pleas might eaſily be anſwered. Nothing more, one ſhould imagine, is requiſite, than to aſk the plain queſtion of the text, *Have ye the words of eternal life?*—If the pleaſures of ſenſe, and temptations of the world, propoſe themſelves as guides to happineſs, they ſhould at leaſt *pretend* to ſomething beyond this life; for as we conſiſt of a ſoul, as well as a body, if both are not provided for, the proviſion is certainly very defective.—But, deluſive as its pleas are, they cannot ſo far impoſe upon us. The moſt joyous of them cannot pretend to ſay, they can make any proviſion for the ſouls of men. One ſhould hope, then, that all, who are not guided merely like the brutes by paſſions and appetites, but

but wiſh to be thought in ſome degree reaſonable creatures, would diſmiſs, with a ſhort anſwer, all the pleaſures *of the world*, in the light of guides to happineſs.

But the world produces other guides to happineſs.

And firſt, we are told, that reaſon is the great light which God hath appointed for the direction of man. Reaſon is his guide in every thing which relates both to this world and the next. A written law, like the ſcripture, may be ſubject to various interpretations. Different men put different ſenſes upon it. But reaſon holds up a ſteady light; to which if we attend carefully, we cannot err.

And, no doubt, to diſmiſs our reaſon, is to diſmiſs one of our beſt friends; and yet, to ſet it up as a guide above ſcripture is, on the other hand, as dangerous. What is our reaſon, unleſs it be informed? How are the ſavages of the earth regulated by its light? They are human beings—they have the uſe of reaſon as much as we: but if reaſon is no light to them, it is at leaſt plain it is not qualified to be a general guide. Without proper information, indeed, our reaſon can be no guide at all; and we may with great

great probability ſuppoſe, that its beſt improvements, in civilized countries, have been obtained from the *words of eternal life*. So that they who ſet up reaſon againſt revelation, would deſtroy the very thing to which their reaſon is indebted for its chief improvement. For it hath been often ſhewn by learned men, that human reaſon hath been greatly indebted to revelation for that knowledge, which the Jewiſh religion firſt ſpread in the world, and afterwards the chriſtian.

Another inſtructor, again, will tell us, there may be ſome truth in this; and that reaſon, in many parts of the world, appears very unable to conduct us rightly. But that, inſtead of reaſon, if we ſet up conſcience, we ſhall have an inward judge, which, if properly attended to, will keep us free from all miſtakes. In liſtening to conſcience we cannot err; for it will ſufficiently diſtinguiſh between right and wrong.

Conſcience, no doubt, is an admirable principle to regulate our actions: but here again, unleſs the dictates of conſcience, like thoſe of reaſon, are properly informed, they will miſlead us. Suppoſe a judge comes down to try cauſes among us; before he can judge properly, ſhould he not firſt, think you, make himſelf acquainted with

with the laws of the land?—ſhould he not take his direction from them? And without this direction, would he be any judge at all? How could he know what was lawful, and what was unlawful? How could he know the nature of offences; and how to ſuit proper puniſhments to each?—Juſt ſuch a judge is conſcience, without information. Things, even wicked, the conſciences of men have often allowed. In countries, even where the chriſtian faith is profeſſed, we find men have been put to torture and death, barely for holding innocent opinions in religion: and conſcience allows it; nay, calls it religion; and ſuppoſes, that the God of mercy is ſerved by the exceſſes of cruelty. Conſcience in truth, unleſs it be properly informed, will allow any thing.—Our conſciences therefore, though they are the beſt directors, when under the influence of true religion, are certainly, when left to themſelves, no directors at all; and, when ill-directed, are great miſleaders.

Among faſhionable people, another principle is ſometimes ſet up in the room of conſcience, called *honour*—a very nice principle, which will not bear the ſlighteſt imputation. The man of honour is a finiſhed character: the leaſt reflection

on

on his veracity fires him to the quick; but he will kill his friend in a duel—he will commit adultery—he will ruin his family by gaming—he will do a thouſand wicked things, and his honour will not ſuffer the leaſt injury. It is very plain then that honour, in *its common acceptation*, is no guide. We may diſcard *it* therefore, without farther hearing. It is merely a principle of the world, and means only to adorn a bad practice with an honeſt name. True honour ſpeaks no language but that of religion; and whenever we ſee them ſeparated, we may be aſſured that honour, whatever importance it may aſſume, is in fact a debaſing principle. Like the goſpel-tree, it may be known by its fruits.

As all theſe pretences, therefore, to the words of eternal life are juſtly rejected, let us aſk the queſtion once more, Where may theſe words at length be found? Whither ſhall we go? What guides *ſhall* we follow?

This leads me to the ſecond point I propoſed to conſider.

We need not wander long. We may venture to ſet up the holy ſcriptures, in their plaineſt and ſimpleſt dreſs, as a ſufficient guide. Difficulties indeed there are; but the life-directing precepts they

they contain are ſufficiently eaſy; and he who reads the ſcriptures with an unprejudiced mind, muſt be convinced, that the whole end they have in view, is to lead mankind to their trueſt and beſt happineſs, both here and hereafter. They inform our reaſon; they guide our conſciences; in ſhort, they have the words both of temporal and eternal life.

But though we may, without doubt, pronounce all this of the ſcripture, yet ſtill there remains with it much difficulty with regard to the interpretation of it. People of different perſuaſions hold different opinions; and yet they all ſay, their opinions depend on ſcripture. To aſſiſt you therefore in reading ſcripture, I ſhould wiſh to give you two or three rules, which I hope would prevent your receiving any thing from it, but the words of eternal life.

In the firſt place, open your teſtaments with minds prepared to liſten to what you are taught. In general, people ſettle their opinions firſt, and ſearch ſcripture afterwards for arguments. One is a baptiſt—another a methodiſt—a third a quaker—a fourth, a churchman; and men ſearch the ſcriptures, not ſo much to receive inſtruction, as to obtain proof—not ſo much to learn what they

they are to believe, and do, as to find ſcripture authority for what they wiſh to believe, and do: they ſearch not for the religion of chriſtianity, but for the opinions of a ſect: they overlook the plain and eaſy precepts of ſcripture, in which men of all profeſſions, no doubt, may be ſaved; but employ themſelves chiefly in thoſe parts, which they think make the greateſt diſtinction between them and others. And what can men expect from this? Can they hope to receive the words of eternal life, by employing ſcripture only as a teſt of oppoſition—as a ſort of banner to fight under? By no means. It is only the honeſt, ſincere enquirer, who comes to his Bible with a heart deſirous to learn his duty in the conſcientious diſcharge of a good life—who can hope to find it in the words of eternal life.—*Faith working by love*, is the ſubſtance of religion; and he who places his religion on any thing but a holy life, through faith in Chriſt, muſt not hope, of whatever ſect he is, to find the words of eternal life.

Secondly, when difficulties ariſe in reading the ſcriptures, and you cannot explain them by the general intention of the word of God, which is to make them happy in this world and the next,

be

be not diſcouraged: you may be ſure, if they are difficulties, they are not neceſſary to ſalvation. Thus, for inſtance, when you read, that the Son of Man came *not to ſend peace on earth, but a ſword*, if you cannot explain the expreſſion conſiſtently with that general kindneſs, and mild diſpoſition, which the chriſtian religion every where inculcates, leave it for the preſent, and diſquiet not yourſelves with a difficulty, from which many have taken a wrong turn, and raiſed a ſpirit of perſecution againſt their brethren. There is not, be aſſured, a falſer interpretation than this.—Again, when you read that the *potter hath power over his clay, to make one veſſel to honour, and another to diſhonour*, do not ſuppoſe, as many have done, that ſome are fated from their birth to ſalvation, and others to damnation; but if you cannot reconcile the paſſage with the general tenor of the goſpel, which aſſures us, that all mankind may be ſaved if they are not wanting to themſelves, proceed to the more eaſy parts of ſcripture. All that is neceſſary, is plain; and take it for granted, that what you cannot underſtand can never be required.—But above all things take care not to be numbered among thoſe who, as St. Peter tells us, wreſt ſuch parts

of ſcripture as are hard to be underſtood to their own deſtruction; drawing from them ſuch notions of God and religion, as are unworthy of both. The ſcriptures are not underſtood at all, if they are ſuppoſed to contradict that gentleneſs, that goodneſs, that univerſal tenderneſs to mankind, which the goſpel every where expreſſes.

Another rule I ſhall give you, and one of the beſt, to acquire from ſcripture the words of eternal life, is to live up to what you know; and as you improve your knowledge, to improve your lives. He who improves what he has, even in this world, ſtands the beſt chance of getting more. Subdue your paſſions and appetites; repent of your ſins, and amend your hearts; ſupport your families, and inſtruct them; love your neighbour, and be kind to him; ſerve God, and praiſe him;—do all this, and you will find you underſtand the ſcriptures better than you imagined. *He that will do the will of God*, ſaith St. John, *ſhall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God.* There is no better comment upon the ſcripture than a good life: one throws a light upon the other. It was not the end of the goſpel to make men more learned, but more good;

and he who grows better by reading the ſcriptures, may expect God's bleſſing upon his reading; and that God will vouchſafe him more and more light. He will underſtand the ſcriptures more: he will feel, their true meaning is to improve the heart. The wicked man cannot feel them: they can only be underſtood in that ſpirit in which they were written.

The laſt help I ſhall mention to you, is that of prayer. Without God's aſſiſtance we can do nothing; and that aſſiſtance can only be obtained by prayer, and the ſtrenuous uſe of our own endeavours. To make God's word effectual in our hearts, muſt be the work of the Spirit of God. Lighten our darkneſs—our *ſpiritual* as well as *natural* darkneſs—is a prayer we have all occaſion to uſe; and may the Holy Spirit of God aſſiſt us in ſeeing clearly the things which make for our everlaſting peace—that we may know what is the perfect will of God—that we may *feel* the words of eternal life, which is the only way to underſtand them—the only way to make them the foundation of all our happineſs here, and all our hopes hereafter.

END OF THE SERMONS.

HINTS

FOR

SERMONS.

SERMONS.

L.

There ſhall be weeping, and gnaſhing of teeth, when ye ſhall ſee Abraham, and Iſaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourſelves thruſt out.—Luke, xiii. 28.

HERE is an argument for a holy life, perhaps not much attended to, but drawn from the moſt acute feelings of the human heart. If you lead a bad life, you may not only have your own poſitive miſery to bear, but the additional diſtreſs of ſeeing yourſelf for ever excluded from thoſe you moſt valued, who are entering into a ſtate of happineſs. Here is a puniſhment ariſing, as perhaps moſt of our future puniſhments do, immediately from our vices. Envy is a vile paſſion, and here probably it becomes a ſource of endleſs puniſhment. This ſeems to be the meaning of our Saviour's obſervation. What an exaggerated puniſhment muſt it be, (if there were no other puniſhment provided,) for parents to be ſhut out from children—children from parents; wives

from huſbbands—huſbands from wives; brothers, ſiſters, and friends—all thus ſeparated, and under ſuch afflicting circumſtances to thoſe who are ſhut out in miſery. It is a puniſhment probably only on the guilty; for it is not likely that the righteous ſhould be diſturbed by affections for thoſe who had loſt God's favour: their earthly friendſhips, not reſting on the ſtable foundation of religion, but on pleaſing manners, good ſenſe, or worldly accompliſhments of different kinds, fade naturally away, when theſe are loſt. Nothing ſurely, but ſuch virtues as are the offspring of religion, can be the foundation of a heavenly friendſhip.—How ſtrong a motive ſhould this be to thoſe who have an affection for pious perſons, to qualify themſelves in ſuch a manner as will enable them to meet their friends in a happy futurity?

II.

It is the Lord, let him do what ſeemeth him good.—
1 Sam. iii. 18.

THIS was the ſubmiſſive anſwer of the pious Eli, on his receiving a threatening meſſage from the Lord, for not ſufficiently reſtraining the wickedneſs of his ſons. It is one of thoſe aphoriſms of which ſcripture is full; and which are ſo well calculated to be always carried with us, for conſtant uſe. The world is full of affliction. A ſtate of trial muſt neceſſarily be ſupported by afflictive circumſtances. Adverſity is equally neceſſary as proſperity, to try the hearts of men. But it is a happy thing that we have here a rule which is ſufficient, if we would piouſly attend to it, to ſupport us under the worſt of our afflictions;—*It is the Lord, let him do what ſeemeth him good:* he knows, with unerring certainty, what is beſt for all his creatures: he doth not willingly afflict the children of men; but tempers the affliction always

always with a view to their good. What a happineſs therefore ought we to think it, to be always under the care of ſo righteous a Maſter, who will treat us, we may be aſſured, like a father.——We may be reminded alſo, that ſubmiſſion is even naturally the beſt way to make ſuffering eaſier; for, in ſpite of us, the Lord *will* do what ſeemeth him good. We may *kick againſt the pricks*; but we ſhall only hurt ourſelves.

III.

Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.—Luke, xi. 1.

ONE ſhould think, that creatures ſituated as men are, in the midſt of difficulties, and deficiences of various kinds, might know what to pray for without being taught; eſpecially when aſſured, as we are, that we are under the protection of an omnipotent Power, whoſe command is, *Aſk, and ye ſhall receive.* But men are *naturally* blind and ignorant, and unacquainted with their own wants, both temporal and ſpiritual. We, indeed, under the influence of the goſpel, are better taught; but aſk the wild native of any country on this ſubject, and he will give you ſuch an anſwer, as ſhews how much he ſtands in need of being taught. The diſciples of Jeſus were not in ſo low a ſtate of religion as is here deſcribed; but as they were yet only young in their profeſſion, it may be ſuppoſed a leſſon on this

this ſubject could not have been unwanted by them.

The Lord's Prayer, which our Saviour gave them on this occaſion, may be detailed, though not methodically, into all the offices of devotion.

The firſt object of prayer is, to praiſe God for his great attributes; particularly thoſe of power, wiſdom, and goodneſs. Theſe are the foundation of all prayer.

Our own ſpiritual wants ſeem properly to be the next objects of our prayers. When we look into our own breaſts, inſtead of meeting that calm and joyous ſunſhine that ſhould always accompany a good conſcience, we find, too often, turbulent and unruly paſſions and appetites—we find little of the love of God, but much of the love of the world: the joys of heaven are ſeldom thought of, but the pleaſures of life are ſpread in lively colours. Of charity, and love to man, we find very little; but a ſtrong propenſity often to envy and malice: little humility, but much pride and ſelf-conceit; much ſelf-indulgence, but little ſelf-denial; little reſignation, but much diſcontent: a diſpoſition to falſehood and knavery, but no great love for truth.—Now what an infinity of ſubjects does all this corruption open

for

for prayer?—for the aſſiſtance of God's Holy Spirit to *lead us out of temptation, and deliver us from evil.*

And as our own breaſts furniſh us with all this variety of ſubjects for prayer; ſo alſo do external objects around us. Every thing we meet with is a temptation; and, without the aſſiſtance of God's grace, may lead us into ſin. The buſineſs we are enaged in—the company we keep—the clothes we wear—our meat and drink—our amuſements—our wealth, or poverty; in ſhort, all the varied circumſtances and conditions of life have a tendency to lead us into ſin. Our paſſage, therefore, through a world of ſo much trial, muſt either be aſſiſted by the grace of God, which earneſt prayer alone can procure; or we muſt be continually betrayed by the temptations around us, and drawn into ſin.

Beſides all theſe ſubjects of our prayers, the neceſſaries of life may in a degree be the objects of them: *Give us, day by day, our daily bread,* is among the petitions that are allowed.

In the ſame way, in dangerous circumſtances, we may pray for the divine aſſiſtance in carrying us through them.

We

We may pray alſo for our friends and relations; for our families in particular.

Prayers for mankind in general, and for the governments we live under, though touched on in the Lord's Prayer, belong rather to public than private devotion.

Thankſgiving, however, is a branch of prayer that belongs to both. We have all numberleſs reaſons to thank God for his bleſſings. Our life, health, preſervation, and all the benefits we daily enjoy, afford conſtant renewals of thankfulneſs. But the great bleſſing of the goſpel, and our Saviour's atonement for ſin, ſhould never be forgotten.

IV.

Time and chance happeneth to all.—
Eccleſiaſtes, ix. 11.

THIS was the obſervation of one of the wiſeſt of men. But he did not mean to conſider it as a truth. He knew better: he knew that time and chance happen to none; but that all things are under the direction of a wiſe and good Providence. This he ſufficiently teſtifies in other parts of his diſcourſe.—But why ſhould he make a remark ſo foreign to the truth?—He ſpeaks merely to the common opinion of the world. Though time and chance happen to none, yet every thing has the appearance of time and chance happening to all.——But ſtill how comes it, that in a world of order, every thing bears the *appearance* of diſorder? and that *time and chance* ſhould have the appearance of governing, what is, in fact, under the moſt *exact mode* of government?

This

This queſtion is not very difficult to decide. A ſtate of trial *muſt* be a ſtate of uncertainty. If every thing happened in order—if the battle was always to the ſtrong, riches the reward of virtue, and poverty the puniſhment of vice, this world would be a ſtate of retribution, not of trial. Uncertainty, therefore, is one mean of making it a ſtate of trial: it throws out to us this grand leſſon, in our paſſage through life, that we muſt depend on God—not on ourſelves, nor on any thing which the world preſents to us. Beſides, a ſtate of uncertainty puts the whole world in motion. If every one was confined in his expectation, the life of man would ſtagnate. But the uncertainty of things ſets all adventurers at work, calls up a variety of exertions, and opens a field for various virtues and vices, in which human nature is put to many a ſevere trial.—Induſtry, prudence, and other virtues, are often encouraged; and are indeed the beſt means of inſuring ſucceſs: but they often fail, while the vices in oppoſition to them ſucceed.—So that the idea of uncertainty in all worldly affairs is ſtill kept up; and of courſe this world is conſidered not as a ſtate of retribution, but as a ſtate of trial.

V.

I keep under my body, and bring it into ſubjection.
1 Cor. ix. 17.

THIS is a mode of expreſſion very uſual in ſpeaking of that compound being, called *Man*. It divides him naturally into two parts:—*I keep under my body*. *I* is ſuppoſed to be one part of the man; the *body*, the other. This mode of ſpeaking plainly and properly points out the rational and the ſenſitive parts, and gives the former the ſuperiority. *I*, the rational part, keep under the *body*, which is the ſenſitive.

Having thus ſettled the *dramatis perſonæ* of the text, if I may ſo ſpeak, let us now conſider its contents. The great reaſon, we ſee, for keeping the *body under*, is to bring it into ſubjection, that all its functions may co-operate with reaſon. The great mean of obtaining this ſubjection, is ſelf-denial. If we make it our buſineſs to indulge ourſelves in eating and drinking, in amuſements, and other things pleaſing to the ſenſes,

we plainly give the inferior part of our nature the ſuperiority—we bring the man into ſubjection to the brute. God Almighty hath added a pleaſure to the indulgence of all the appetites, neceſſary for the preſervation of life. If eating, for inſtance, were attended with no pleaſure, faſting might be dangerous. This ſtimulus is common both to man and beaſt; only there is this difference: the beaſt never goes beyond its allotted limit; the man turns all his pleaſure, beyond the allotted limit, which ſhould be the object of ſelf-denial, into miſchief and wickedneſs. When that is the caſe, *we*, inſtead of our *bodies*, are brought into ſubjection.

VI.

Be mindful of the words, which were ſpoken before by the holy prophets; and of the commandments of us the apoſtles of the Lord and Saviour.—2 Pet. iii. 2.

WE have here obedience to the goſpel, enforced by the proof from prophecies; and there is not, I think, a more convincing proof. Cavils have been made againſt the miracles of the goſpel—againſt the purity of its precepts, and the myſteriouſneſs of its doctrines; but I ſee not how any argument can well lie againſt prophecy. We have the ſtrongeſt proof, that the books in which theſe prophecies are contained, exiſted many hundred years before the birth of Chriſt. We are well aſſured alſo, that they were aſcribed to the Meſſiah by the ancient Jews. We never heard of any perſon to whom they could be aſcribed, but our Jeſus; and with him they coincide as exactly as two parallel lines. I ſpeak not of all the prophecies of the Old Teſtament;

many of which are obſcure, though eaſily reconcileable to the great events of the goſpel; but I ſpeak of thoſe prophecies only, which are ſo plain that no objection can reaſonably be made to them.—On the ſtrength of theſe prophecies, therefore, St. Peter founds the obedience of his converts. His argument is, that if you believe the goſpel on this evidence, it follows, that no farther cavil is admiſſible: the precept, however harſh, muſt be obeyed; and the doctrine, however myſterious, muſt be believed.

VII.

Pure religion, and undefiled, before God and the Father, is this: To viſit the fatherleſs and widows, in their affliction; and to keep himſelf unſpotted in the world.—James, i. 27.

THIS is certainly not a complete definition of religion. Of the three parts—of our duty to *God*, our *neighbour*, and *ourſelves*, the firſt is wholly omitted; and neither of the others is derived, as we know they ought both to be, from faith in Chriſt. All therefore which St. James meant to ſhew in this paſſage was, the great value he put on practical religion; which is indeed one of his chief topics through this whole epiſtle. —In obedience, therefore, to his doctrine, we ſhould be very careful never to depreciate good works; nor to preach any doctrine, which may tend to make the common people think lightly of them; as we are here aſſured, that pure and undefiled religion conſiſts ſo much in them.— Our hearers, however, cannot be cautioned too

much, not to preſume on theſe works; nor to truſt our ſalvation on any thing, but the merits of Chriſt. What merit of *any kind* our good works may have, is not for us to aſſign. That muſt be left entirely to God.

VIII.

Charity ſhall cover a multitude of ſins.—1 Pet. iv. 8.

THE meaning of this paſſage is rather obſcure. Some contend, that charity covers, or blots out, our own ſins; others, that it covers, or conceals, the ſins of our neighbours. At preſent, however, I mean not to enter into the obſcurities of the text; but only to take occaſion from it to point out the various covers for ſin, which men are commonly accuſtomed to plead.

The hardened profligate ruſhes headlong into wickedneſs; and though he muſt know, *that hell and deſtruction follow hard behind*, he goes madly on, without endeavouring to procure the leaſt cover for his ſins.

There are others, again, who have ſome little remains of conſcience left—who would wiſh to go to heaven; but they are wary traders, and unwilling to pay too great a price. To give up all the pleaſures of the world, and lead a ſtrict,

religious life, is too much: but they are very ready to barter with God Almighty.

Some of them will aſk, what almſgiving to the poor will do for them? They are willing to cover their ſins by great bounty in this way; but theſe traders muſt be informed, that, as far as themſelves are concerned, they might as well keep their alms in their pockets. Theirs is juſt the old popiſh practice of *indulgences*. In both caſes, money is paid for a liberty to commit ſin.

In the ſame manner, others endeavour to cover their ſins with what they call their virtues. Their honeſty—their temperance—their veracity, or ſome other virtue which they think they poſſeſs, they ſet in oppoſition to ſome favourite ſins; and hope, under ſuch cover, to eſcape.—But theſe men muſt not be ſurpriſed to hear, that virtues ariſing from ſuch motives are no virtues at all; and, inſtead of atoning for ſins, are in fact themſelves only ſins in diſguiſe.

Others again will endeavour to cover their ſins, by pleading the bounty of heaven. The earth is full of good things; why may I not uſe them? What were they given me for?—You may uſe them: with gratitude to God, you may uſe them; but in gratitude to God, be content with the uſe. All beyond is ſinful abuſe.

Another

Another cover for ſin is ſometimes drawn from the infirmities of human nature: they are ſuch that ſin is unavoidable, and therefore excuſeable. That ſin is unavoidable, is certain; and hence ariſes the neceſſity of a Saviour. But how far we are to make this a cover for ſuch ſins as we wilfully continue in, is a point which, it is to be feared, will be ſettled at the laſt day much to our confuſion.

Their circumſtances, and ſituation in life, are conſidered with many as making a good cover for ſin. While we live in the world, they cry, we muſt in ſome degree follow the ways of the world. The ways of the world are not always conſonant with ſtrict duty; but we muſt now and then temporize, or we are nothing.—But perhaps our ſituation in life is not ſo commonly ſeductive as we are apt to ſuppoſe. No honeſt profeſſion, I believe, has any thing in it oppoſite to the duties of religion. If however we have unhappily choſen a profeſſion which avowedly leads us into ſin, we have our option: we may take either the broad or narrow way; and ſerve either God, or mammon.

There are others again, who ſeek to cover their ſins under the mercies of God; which they

ſay

ſay are infinite, and cannot be exhauſted. But theſe people ſeem to forget, that the attributes of the Deity muſt not be conſtrued ſo as to contradict each other. The mercy of God, it is true, is infinite; but his juſtice is infinite alſo: they both univerſally extend to all people.

There is ſtill one more cover for ſin, which ſome people plead; and indeed the only one they can plead—humble confeſſion, and ſincere repentance; with truſt in the mercy of God through the merits of Chriſt.

IX.

Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him ſing pſalms.—James, v. 13.

THE text ſeems intended rather to regulate our gloomy, and cheerful hours, than as a piece of literal advice. The life of man is a chequered ſhade: light and darkneſs are continually reciprocating. The former often twinkles on the very ſpot, which had immediately before been occupied by the latter.—Man therefore, thus ſubject to ſuch oppoſite paroxyſms, ſhould poſſeſs ſomething to ſecure him from the pernicious effects of both.

Now a ſenſe of religion is the only ſecurity he can have; and this may have its full effect in all circumſtances, if the mind be fully and ſeriouſly impreſſed with it. If the inſtrument therefore is well-tuned, the muſic may be good, whether it play a dirge or a ſonnet.—Something like it is the apoſtle's advice: *If you are afflicted, pray; if you are merry, ſing pſalms.* Not that,

when you are afflicted, it is ſuppoſed you are always to pray. But as prayer is the grand ſupport of affliction, you ſhould always live, eſpecially when the hand of God is upon you, in the ſpirit of prayer—in that truſt in God, and in the merits of a Redeemer, which every one muſt feel who prays with ſincerity.——Again, when you are enlivened with a ray of proſperity, and the ſpirits are boyant, though it is not expected you ſhould always *ſing pſalms*, yet you ſhould always live under ſuch a ſenſe of that gratitude, and religious thankfulneſs to the Diſpoſer of all events, as will prevent your joy from running riot; and will change it from an earthly into a heavenly feeling.

X.

As new-born babes, deſire the ſincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.—1 Pet. ii. 2.

THE ſcriptures are continually exhorting us to put off the old man—to be renewed in the ſpirit, and to be born again. In conformity to theſe goſpel-ideas, the apoſtle Peter introduces the beautiful alluſion in the text, in which he recommends to his converts, as new-born babes, the ſincere milk of the word.—The beauty and aptneſs of this alluſion is very ſtriking.

It conſiſts, firſt, in the ſimplicity of the food. Moſt of the food we uſe undergoes various kinds of mixtures, and different modes of dreſſing: but milk is ſo ſimple a kind of food, that it requires neither mixture nor cookery; and is therefore properly an emblem of the *ſincere word of truth.*

Then again, its nouriſhing quality makes it ſtill more an emblem of that goſpel, which nouriſhes to everlaſting life.

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Its ſweet, balſamic nature, makes it efficacious in the cure of many bodily diſorders, as the goſpel is a remedy for thoſe of the ſoul.

Even its ſpotleſs white, without any tincture of colour, brings it ſtill nearer the idea of goſpel-purity.

Then again, the manner in which the child takes this nouriſhment, carries on the alluſion very happily. He takes it with that eagerneſs which ſhews his love for it: he loaths all other food in compariſon: though he is fed with it every day, the repetition never cloys him; and his growth ſhews how well it agrees with his conſtitution. This mode of the child's receiving its food, is a juſt exhibition of the true, religious mode of accepting the goſpel.——It is not often that a ſingle alluſion illuſtrates a ſubject in ſo many different points of view.

XI.

We both labour, and ſuffer reproach, becauſe we truſt in the living God.—1 Tim. iv. 10.

THAT holy and indefatigable labourer in the vineyard of the Lord, the Writer of this epiſtle, tells his beloved convert, Timothy, in this paſſage, that truſt in God enabled him to undergo all the labours and diſtreſſes of his apoſtleſhip. His labours and diſtreſſes were abundant. Our labours are inſignificant, and our diſtreſſes, commonly, mere trifles, in compariſon with his. It is true, we have not that firmneſs—that heavenly aid, and apoſtolic vigour, which St. Paul had. But our ſufferings are in proportion to our abilities; and we have the ſame ground for going cheerfully through our labours, and for bearing our diſtreſſes, which this holy apoſtle had. We may all, if we pleaſe, *truſt in the living God.*

All the attributes of God adminiſter comfort to man, except his *juſtice*. Here we naturally recoil.

rsel . That man, with all his guilt about him, ſhould ſtand before infinite juſtice, preſents an idea which cannot but make an awful impreſſion. Yet even here we have great room to *truſt in the living God.* His juſtice, infinite as it is, is tempered by mercy equally infinite; and to this is added, the powerful mediation of a bleſſed Redeemer.

But among all the grounds of comfort which we receive from our gracious Creator, with regard both to this world and the next, the contemplation of his *wiſdom*, and his *promiſes*, is the moſt reviving. The former ſets our mind at reſt in this world; the latter carry us happily to the next.

The *wiſdom* of Providence, which orders all the events of this world with ſuch unerring certainty, as to be moſt beneficial not only to mankind in general, but to every individual in particular, ſhould be a conſtant argument with us to ſubmit to every event, however harſh it may appear. If we *fully truſt* in an unerring Providence, it will be *impoſſible* not to acquieſce: if we do not acquieſce, it is *impoſſible* we can fully truſt. At the ſame time let us conſider, that this full truſt in the unerring providence of God,

is

is the only way to ſecure our happineſs among the diſaſters of life. Nothing elſe can adminiſter a full remedy for the many ſufferings we muſt unavoidably feel.

The other great comfort, which *a truſt in the living God* procures for us in the diſtreſſes of this world, is, that they will end in the happineſs of the next. We have God's promiſe for this hope, which turns into certainty. I ſpeak of ſuch only as obey God; and indeed they are the only perſons who ſeek for comfort from theſe divine ſources.

This truſt therefore in the promiſes of God, is our grand comfort in the diſtreſſes of life. It is the leading-ſtar which carries us to Bethlehem; and makes all our journey to that bleſſed reſidence of our Redeemer, full of happy expectation.

XII.

If riches increaſe, ſet not thy heart upon them.—
Pſ. lxii. 10.

WE are cautioned here, not ſo much againſt riches, as againſt the increaſe of them. When a man poſſeſſes only what he has been long accuſtomed to poſſeſs, the danger is leſs: uſe has made his poſſeſſions, whatever they are, familiar to him; but when the poſſeſſion increaſes beyond the ordinary capacity of receiving it, (which is almoſt always the caſe of a ſudden increaſe of wealth,) the moral danger becomes great.—— Am I then, if riches increaſe by the bleſſing of God, on a fair and honeſt profeſſion, to reject the bleſſing, and ſtop in the midſt of golden opportunities?——It is a happy thing when a man can ſet bounds to his acquiſitions, and ſay, *I have enough.* That, however, is not eaſy: the word *enough* is regulated by ſuch a variety of circumſtances, that the ſame definition of it can hardly touch the caſes of any two people.

But

But though it may be difficult to give rules to eſtimate a ſufficiency, yet whatever our poſſeſſions may be, very good rules may be given to prevent our *ſetting our hearts upon them.* If we *ſet our hearts upon them*, they become at once what the ſcripture calls, *the mammon of unrighteouſneſs*; or, the temptations to every mode of wickedneſs: for *the love of money*, we know, *is the root of all evil.*

In the firſt place, their fugitive nature ſhould prevent our ſetting our hearts upon them. We are told, they often *make themſelves wings, and fly away.* And if they do not leave us, we ſhall certainly, in a little time, leave them. And then the queſtion ſtares us in the face, *Whoſe ſhall thoſe good things be which we have provided?*— or, in other words, why did not you make a proper uſe of them in your life-time?

Secondly, we ſhould reflect, how we came by our riches; and, it may be hoped, we ſhall acknowledge we received them from God, *the author and giver of all good.* Whether we obtained them by our own agency, or by any other means, ſtill they are his gift.

This being ſettled, it follows next to aſcertain for what purpoſe God gave them to us. We

cannot ſurely be ſo abſurd as to ſuppoſe, God gave us riches as inſtances of his favour, from any particular regard he had for us. If not, he gave them for other purpoſes. What theſe purpoſes are, we have frequent intimations from ſcripture. We are ordered to uſe our talents in proportion to their value; to be liberal to the poor; and to diſtribute our means, according to the abilities which God hath given us.

Thus then, if riches increaſe, inſtead of *ſetting our hearts upon them*—that is, inſtead of making them the means of a mere ſelf-indulgence, we ſhould *make to ourſelves friends of this mammon of unrighteouſneſs;* and hope, through the mercies of God in Chriſt, they may aſſiſt in procuring us a joyful ſentence in the laſt great day.

XIII.

Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts.—
Matt. xv. 19.

EVIL thoughts ſprout up in every heart. If they are indulged, they ſoon corrupt it; but if checked, and immediately diſcharged, they produce no bad effect.—For the ſake, however, of ſome well-meaning people, who turn every bad thought into a ſin, I ſhould wiſh to offer a ſort of criterion.

In the caſe of *malice*, for inſtance, you conceive a malicious thought againſt an enemy. A wiſh ariſes, that he may be ruined—you take a pleaſure in hearing of any miſchief that may befal him. You aſk, is not this malice?

Let us examine: Do you *indulge* theſe thoughts? No.—Do you think them wrong, and immediately reject them? Yes.—If you had it in your power, would you wiſh to ruin your enemy? By no means, certainly.—Would you be glad to do him a ſervice? I think I ſhould.—Why

then, notwithſtanding your malicious thoughts, you have no malice in your heart. Your bad thoughts mark only your malevolence of nature: your good reſolutions are the heavenly work of grace upon your affections.

The ſame mode of reaſoning may be applied to other bad thoughts. The firſt riſe of them in the mind ſhews only the natural pravity of human nature: the kind affections are afterwards introduced by the grace of God.

XIV.

I ſee the heavens opened, and the Son of Man ſtanding on the right hand of God.—Acts, vii. 55.

THE imagination is not always the moſt uſefully employed in matters of religion. Here it is: the holy martyr, St. Stephen, animates himſelf in the midſt of his ſufferings by ſeeing, in a beatific viſion, the happineſs that awaited him after death. Inſtead of letting his mind reſt on the cruel ſufferings he underwent, he fixed it, by an ardent act of faith, upon a ſcene which occupied all his thoughts—he ſaw *heaven opened, and Jeſus ſitting on the right hand of God.*

This account of St. Stephen's martyrdom, ſeems to be given us as the proper appendage of a ſtate of trial; as an incentive to make us bear more properly the different ſituations in which it engages us.—In ſome happy hour, when we are ſurrounded with the gaieties of the world, and prone to give way to intemperate joy, let us check the delirium. Cheerfulneſs is the garb

of religion: a gloomy melancholy is religion in mourning, which is a dreſs it ſhould ſeldom aſſume; intemperate joy is religion intoxicated. This world is not meant as a ſtate of enjoyment. When we would indulge our minds, therefore, with real enjoyment, let us baniſh all the little, ſelfiſh joys of this world, by letting our imagination looſe among the glories of eternity; and ſeeing, with the dying martyr, *heaven opened, and Jeſus ſitting at the right hand of God.*

Again, in the hour of diſtreſs, when the world ſcowls upon us, and all is darkneſs around, let us endeavour to catch a ray of light through the gloom that ſurrounds us—let us carry our imagination, on the wings of faith, into the celeſtial regions above; and comfort ourſelves with the thoughts of ſeeing *heaven opened, and Jeſus ſitting on the right hand of God.*

XV.

The kingdom of heaven is like a net, which was caſt into the ſea, and gathered of every kind.—Matt. xiii. 47.

JUST ſuch a gathering will there be at the laſt great day: the net will be ſpread abroad, and a final ſeparation made. The name of Chriſtian will then be a name of great conſequence; and many will endeavour to ſhield themſelves under it.—Let us examine their ſeveral pretenſions:—The firſt is the *nominal* chriſtian. He has nothing to ſay, but that he was born in a chriſtian country, and was baptized in the name of Chriſt. Of the faith of a Chriſtian, he knows little; and of the practice, ſtill leſs.

The moral man comes next. He profeſſes the Teſtament to be a moſt excellent ſyſtem of morals; but he expunges from it the divinity of Chriſt—his atonement for ſin—the aſſiſtance of the Holy Spirit; and, in ſhort, all the comfortable doctrines of chriſtianity. Why he acknow-

ledges his Teſtament to be good authority in one caſe, and not in another, is a queſtion which may probably give him ſome difficulty in anſwering hereafter. It may, however, rather be doubted, whether his contempt for the doctrines of chriſtianity may not ſomewhat interfere with his exactneſs in the practice of it.

Let us next take a view of the ſelf-righteous man. He acknowledges all the doctrines of chriſtianity; but he thinks he has not much occaſion for them. Chriſt died, he allows, for ſinners; but he does not conceive himſelf in that claſs. The little errors of his life are loſt in the multitude of his virtues; and he has no fear of appearing in the preſence of God, clothed merely in his own righteouſneſs. It is well for him, if he do not find his miſtake hereafter.—How far God's mercy may extend to ſuch preſumption, is not for us to ſay; but we have no goſpel-ground to hope for God's mercy, unleſs we believe and truſt in the merits of that Redeemer, through whom alone it is promiſed.

The innocent man is queſtioned next. He has no objection to chriſtianity: indeed, he hardly ever thought about it. In a general view, however, he conceives the goſpel to be a law againſt wickedneſs;

wickedneſs; and as ſuch, chiefly, he receives it. He has the guilt of no great ſin upon his conſcience. He troubles not himſelf with motives, and what he calls, the refinements of religion; but hopes, a life free from great wickedneſs will carry him to heaven.

The real Chriſtian is the reverſe of all theſe. Through faith in Chriſt, and a firm belief of all the doctrines of chriſtianity, he converts his moral virtues into chriſtian doctrines; and though he may hope, that in ſome of his works he may pleaſe God, yet he *preſumes* not on any of them, acknowledging with contrition that he has no hopes of ſalvation through his own righteouſneſs, but merely through the merits of his Redeemer. Of courſe, therefore, he thinks an innocent life is not all that is required; but endeavours to recommend himſelf to God, by devotion and prayer—by heavenly affections, and works of charity.

If a ſet diſcourſe ſhould be taken from this hint, it might conclude with an exhortation to a congregation, to examine themſelves by the ſeveral characters ſet before them; from which they might be inſtructed, on proper motives, to imitate the beſt.

XVI.

Ceaſe to do evil; learn to do well.—Iſa. i. 16.

WE have here the whole duty of man in two ſentences. We are firſt to cleanſe the heart from wickedneſs, and then to adorn it with virtues. The ground muſt be prepared, before the ſeed can be ſown.—But there is a manifold difference between theſe two operations; and the prophet ſeems to mark it. By the powers of nature, he ſeems to ſuppoſe we may *ceaſe to do evil. Conſcience, in many caſes, is a law unto itſelf;* and, if it be attended to, will curb many of the great exceſſes of vice. We know it may, from the practice of ſeveral heathen worthies.——But though nature may, in a good degree, prevent *our doing evil*, ſomething more is required to *teach us to do well*—ſomething, as the prophet ſays, which we are to *learn*. Here the goſpel comes in: it teaches us to ſpiritualize our affections, and to regulate all our actions by its holy precepts.

XVII.

Happy is he who condemneth not himſelf in that thing which he alloweth.—Rom. xiv. 22.

FEW men are ſo wicked as not to make ſome excuſe to their own conſciences for their tranſgreſſions of duty. Though they are not ſo weak as to ſuppoſe their excuſes are a cover for ſin; yet an excuſe ſerves to let their minds quietly down, as it were, to the tranſgreſſion. This is what is generally meant by *allowing* a tranſgreſſion. We do not approve it; but by ſome ſophiſtry we have argued ourſelves into the allowance of it.—Now this is the very thing againſt which the apoſtle warns us. Knowing how apt human nature is to quibble itſelf into improper allowances, we are inſtructed not to ſuffer any action, which our conſcience does not fairly allow. The condemnation of conſcience is the avowal of guilt.

XVIII.

The Scribes and Phariſees ſit in Moſes's ſeat. All, therefore, what they bid you obſerve, that obſerve and do: but do not after their works; for they ſay, and do not.—Matt. xxiii. 2.

THIS is a very ſevere cenſure of a very corrupt prieſthood—a prieſthood that gives inſtruction, without example. How far this cenſure of the Scribes and Phariſees characterizes the miniſters of our church, I ſhould not wiſh to inveſtigate. Numbers, no doubt, there are, who add example to precept: at the ſame time, we fear there are many who *ſay, and do not.* To inſtruct, is an eaſy matter. There is ready acceſs, in this enlightened age, to inſtruction of various kinds, which may be eaſily given at ſecond hand; and Moſes's ſeat may be very well filled. But a holy example is a different matter. Here we cannot draw from others, as we may topics of inſtruction. We muſt draw all from ourſelves; and if future conſiderations have no weight with us, let us at leaſt conſider the ſcandal of talking and acting in different ways, and thus continually giving ourſelves the lie.

XIX.

This people honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me.—Matt. xv. 8.

THIS was ſpoken of the Scribes and Phariſees, whoſe religion went no farther than their lips.—But it was the application of a prophecy, which may extend to this people, or that people, or any people, who treat God with their lips, and not with their hearts.——More or leſs, all our prayers, alas! come under the prophet's cenſure. Who can keep his devotion ſo guarded, as never to ſuffer his thoughts to idle abroad? But when we keep the beſt guard upon them we can, in driving out all intruding thoughts, it may be hoped we may in a great degree eſcape the prophet's cenſure. He only is the guilty perſon, who deliberately makes the time of his devotion a time for thinking over any ſubject which may then occupy his thoughts—who can ſettle an account, in his mind, at church, or adjuſt the terms of a bargain—and have his lips alone in God's ſervice.

XX.

What is a man profited, if he ſhould gain the whole world, and loſe his own ſoul?—Matt. xvi. 26.

WE ſee how highly our bleſſed Saviour eſtimates the ſoul of man. All the gratifications which the whole world can afford, he tells us, are nothing in the compariſon.—What then ſhall we ſay of the folly of thoſe men, who ſell their ſouls, in a manner, for nothing—for a few of the fugitive and guilty pleaſures of this world? What ſhall we ſay of him, for inſtance, who ſells his ſoul for a little knaviſh gain?—or of him, who ſells it for the pleaſure of getting drunk?—or, for the pleaſure of curſing and ſwearing?—or, for any other of the ſhort-lived pleaſures of this world? For all theſe wretched commodities, we know, the ſoul of man is often bartered.—Let us then be aſhamed of ſo ruinous a trade; and take care to preſerve faithfully ſo noble a depoſit as the ſoul of man, which our Saviour thought was more valuable than even the whole world of inanimate nature.

XXI.

Chriſt died for our ſins, according to the ſcriptures.
1. Cor. xv. 3.

THE ſatisfaction of Chriſt for the ſins of mankind, ſays the objector, is a very wonderful doctrine.

No doubt, it is.

But I can entertain no idea of it.

How is it poſſible you ſhould?—It is one of thoſe great points in the hands of God, which man cannot underſtand; and you have only to qualify yourſelf for receiving the benefit of it.

But how can I believe what I do not underſtand?

On the credit of others. You ſurely on that foundation believe many things, which you do not underſtand. You believe that the tides of the ocean are governed by the moon: but you do not underſtand that truth; nor know any thing of it, but what you believe on the credit of others. You believe the wine is good, though

it is not yet landed; and you know nothing of it, but what you believe on the credit of your wine-merchant. You take a long journey, though you know nothing of the roads, the inns, or the diſtance, but what others have told you.—The atonement of Chriſt is mentioned over and over in ſcripture. If, therefore, you pay the ſame credit to ſcripture which you do to a wine-merchant, or an inn-keeper, you will believe it.—The queſtion, therefore, immediately ſubſides into this point—We muſt either totally give up ſcripture, or believe in the atonement of Chriſt.

XXII.

A ſhort and connected View of God's Diſpenſations and Revelations to Mankind.

AS this world had its beginning, we may ſuppoſe that God foreſaw all its various ſituations, and had a view to its various connections among them.

In the firſt place, then, the great intention of this world ſeems to be, to make it a ſtate of preparation for a better. God might have made all the inhabitants of it happy at once, like angels. But God's modes of happineſs are as various as all his other works; and he choſe to make this his new world happy by paſſing through a ſtate of trial. Let us then ſee how this world is fitted for ſuch a ſtate. God has thought fit to inform us of its origin, by authority that we cannot reject.

The firſt that ſtrikes us is, the account we have of a paradiſaical ſtate. Many parts of it have given offence; and particularly, that a being,

ing, endowed with ſo many noble qualities, enriched with ſuch various gifts, and ſurrounded with ſuch a ſuperfluity of happineſs, ſhould be treated only as a pageant of a day, and removed before he had taken full poſſeſſion of his Creator's bounty.

Among the various conjectures that have been made, and conjectures that have been offered, to reconcile theſe ſeeming inconſiſtences to God's general plan of goodneſs, I hope it will not be taken amiſs if I add one conjecture more:—As we laid it down as a poſition, that this world was to prepare us for a better through a ſtate of trial, it does not ſeem difficult to link the ſtate of paradiſe into this chain.

We ſuppoſe, then, that God never intended a ſtate of paradiſe as a laſting ſtate; but that he intended it only as a grand title-page to the world he had juſt formed. Here the inhabitants might ſee a ſtate of happineſs playing before them; but that it could be obtained only upon the obſervance of certain conditions, or, paſſing through a ſtate of trial.—Now, in general, the Old Teſtament ſeems to carry on the ſame idea. Abraham's land of reſt was to be entered by a trial. And all the patriarchs, and good men of thoſe times,

times, were taught to conſider themſelves as ſtrangers and pilgrims on earth, in their paſſage to their eternal manſions.

But now frail man was utterly unable to contend with ſuch ſcenes of temptation as the world offered. The next ſtep, therefore, that God took to animate his new world was, to promiſe heavenly aid to thoſe who paſſed conſcientiouſly through their trial. Here come in the gracious terms of the goſpel. The goſpel ſtamps its authority on all that went before. It gives the world rules to live by; and, through the atonement of a bleſſed Saviour, promiſes forgiveneſs to all ſuch as conſcientiouſly endeavour to live under their duty.—It, laſtly, opens that glorious ſcene of reſt, which every pious paſſenger through this world conſiders as the ultimate end of all his trials.

XXIII.

Except ye be born of water and ſpirit, ye cannot enter into the kingdom of God.—John, iii. 5.

THIS is the introduction to the kingdom of heaven, which our Saviour tells us he expects. We are to be baptized into his goſpel, and to qualify ourſelves for his diſciples by our obedience to it. This is what is commonly called regeneration. We muſt put off the old man, and put on the new. But though regeneration is a ſcriptural term, yet it is ſo often explained, that eaſier language might be obtained than ſuch terms as lead us more into ſcholaſtic ideas. I do not ſee what you can make more of regeneration, than repentance, and amendment of heart and life. Yes, you ſay, the regenerated man muſt be under the direction of the Spirit of God. No doubt of it; and ſo muſt the penitent man, or his repentance will come to nothing.—If we go deeper, and talk of regeneration with a myſterious air, I ſhould only ſay, that all we know of it

it is, that we ſhould amend our hearts and lives; and endeavour to obtain the aid of the Holy Spirit by fervent prayer. But as to any enquiries further, I think our Saviour's anſwer is very applicable:—*The wind bloweth where it liſteth, and thou heareſt the ſound thereof; but canſt not tell whence it cometh, or whither it goeth. So is every one who is born of the Spirit.*

END OF THE HINTS FOR SERMONS.

ANALYSIS

OF

ST. PAUL's EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.

TWO great *errors*, ſo far as I am able to judge of ſcripture, have taken their riſe from St. Paul's Epiſtle to the Romans: the doctrine of *juſtification by faith alone;* and the Calviniſtic *doctrine of predeſtination.* Both of them appear to me entirely loſt, in a cloſe attention to the ſcope of the Epiſtle.

I have therefore drawn up the following conciſe analyſis of it, which is intended to bring within a narrow compaſs the principal intention of the whole, and the connection of its ſeveral parts.

It is one of the peculiarities of St. Paul's writing, to branch out frequently from his immediate ſubject, and, after diſcuſſing ſome point which thus

thus occaſionally falls in his way, to return abruptly to his firſt argument. In this analyſis I mean not to follow the Apoſtle through theſe digreſſions, but to attend chiefly to what appears to be the main purpoſe of the Epiſtle.

The Apoſtle ſeems to have had two grand points in view. The *firſt* was, to convince the Jews of the excellence of chriſtianity, and of its ſuperiority to the law of Moſes; and the *ſecond*, to reconcile them to the idea of God's giving the Gentiles a participation with them of its benefits. On both theſe heads the Jews were very tenacious of their ſeveral prejudices. Of their attachment to the law of Moſes, and blending its ritual with the doctrines of chriſtianity, we have various inſtances in the hiſtorical parts of the New Teſtament; as we have alſo of their believing themſelves the ſole inheritors, through Abraham, of the promiſes of religion; though the Baptiſt had early told them, that God was able of the very ſtones to raiſe up children to Abraham.—But let us go through the ſeveral chapters regularly.

CHAP. I.—The Apoſtle begins his Epiſtle, by ſhewing the neceſſity of redemption. He firſt takes a general view of man in a ſtate of nature,

in

in which human depravity appears in its greateſt exceſſes.

CHAP. II.—He then turns to the Jew, who has no right, he ſays, to arraign the Gentile, as his own practice, notwithſtanding the holy law he profeſſed, was little better. *He is not a Jew*, ſays the Apoſtle, *who is one outwardly; for circumciſion conſiſteth not in the letter, but in the heart and ſpirit.*

CHAP. III.—The Apoſtle then opens the grand mode of redemption from ſin, through the goſpel, which was to include (v. 29.) both Jews and Gentiles. Here, with a view to reconcile the Jews to the goſpel, he ſhews how very ſuperior it was to the law.——(CHAP. IV.)—In fact, he obſerves, that reconciliation through the goſpel was promiſed long before the law was eſtabliſhed. So that Abraham's faith, which was imputed to him for righteouſneſs, was faith in a future redemption by Chriſt; and is handed down as an example to his poſterity. If they receive that ſalvation through Chriſt, which Abraham received only through *faith*, the ſame righteouſneſs will be imputed to them.

CHAP. V.—The Apoſtle having mentioned the caſe of Abraham, carries his view ſtill higher—

to the caſe of Adam; from which he infers the *univerſality* of the goſpel. As Adam's tranſgreſſion brought death on all mankind, the reſtoration by Chriſt was meant to be equally univerſal. So that, as all was loſt by Adam, all was reſtored by Chriſt.

CHAP. VI.—The Apoſtle then anſwers an objection, which might be made to his doctrine. As ſin is forgiven through grace, the greater the ſinner (the objector may ſay) the more excellent is the grace that forgives him.—To this the Apoſtle anſwers, that the grand idea of the goſpel is to produce a new life. Its grace was never intended to ſhelter thoſe who continued in ſin, but to ſave thoſe who renounced it. The Chriſtian, therefore, ſhould always conſider himſelf as dead in ſin, but alive through Chriſt.

CHAP. VII.—The Apoſtle then comes nearer the point he had in view; and proceeds to ſhew, that, as God Almighty had ſuperſeded the law by the goſpel, the law of courſe ſhould be eſteemed as dead; and the Jew was now as much at liberty to embrace the goſpel, as a man, after the death of his firſt wife, was at liberty to marry a ſecond.——The Apoſtle adds, that the law indeed taught them what ſin was, but

but not how to avoid its effects: it plainly pointed out the guilt of ſin; but ſhewed, at the ſame time, its own deficiency, in not being able to effect a deliverance; (CHAP. VIII.)—which was only to be expected from Chriſt. The goſpel had effected, therefore, what the law could not effect. Through this heavenly grace we are aſſiſted by the Holy Spirit of God; and as many as are thus led by his Spirit, become his children. It was God's gracious intention, from the beginning of the world, (v. 29, 30,) freely to juſtify all who ſhould accept his holy offer of redemption by the goſpel.

CHAP. IX.—The Apoſtle having opened, in the fifth chapter, the intended univerſality of the goſpel, now takes up the queſtion more at large; and touches, with great tenderneſs, on that doctrine ſo offenſive to the Jews, of giving the Gentiles a participation with them of God's favours. To theſe they conceived they had an excluſive right, as the children of Abraham. But the Apoſtle reminds them, that this mode of adopting what nation he pleaſed to be the inſtrument of his Providence, was only the common means which God had always uſed with mankind: nay, he tells them, it was his method of dealing

even

even with themſelves. God ſingled out the ſtock of Jacob, in preference to that of Eſau, to be the vehicle of his promiſes; and now, on the revelation of the goſpel, he receives the Gentiles as inheritors with them of its bleſſings. They might remember alſo, that this mode of treating *nations* was foretold by the prophet Jeremiah *, under the ſimilitude of a potter and his clay: *Behold, ſaith the Lord, as clay is in the potter's hand, ſo are ye in my hand, O houſe of Iſrael: at what inſtant I ſhall ſpeak concerning a nation to pluck up, and to pull down; and at what inſtant I ſhall ſpeak concerning a nation to build, and to plant it.*——The Apoſtle farther reminds them, that the admiſſion of the Gentiles to the privileges of the goſpel was the ſubject of many prophecies, which might have made that truth very clear to them. And he concludes by obſerving, that the Gentiles ſhould obtain ſalvation through the goſpel, which the Jews could not obtain by an adherence to the law of Moſes.

CHAP. X.—The Apoſtle then, with great tenderneſs, laments the backwardneſs of his countrymen in receiving the goſpel, and their attachment to the law of Moſes, though it was never

* Jeremiah, xviii. 2.

meant

meant to be a *permanent law*, but merely *as a ſchool-maſter to bring us to Chriſt* *; adding, from Iſaiah, a prophecy which ought to be a very alarming one to them, in which God is repreſented, *ſtretching out his arms, all day long, to a diſobedient and gainſaying people.*

CHAP. XI.—The Apoſtle, however, conſoles his Jewiſh converts, by ſhewing them their nation was caſt off only in part; that a remnant ſhould be left; and that a time ſhould come, when all Iſrael (v. 25) ſhould be brought into the fold of Chriſt.—He then turns to his Gentile converts, and, under the ſimilitude of olive-grafts ingrafted into an old ſtock, he exhorts them to ſteadineſs in their profeſſion. If the native branches, he tells them, were cut away, that they might be grafted in from a foreign ſtock, what danger were they in, when even the natural branches, on their *own* ſtock, were found defective?

CHAP. XII. XIII. XIV.—The Apoſtle having brought his argument thus far to a concluſion, ſpends three chapters in giving excellent rules for holy living, and religious behaviour on various occaſions; (CHAP. XV.)—concluding with an affectionate addreſs to his Jewiſh converts,

* Gal. iii. 24.

requeſting

requeſting them to receive the Gentile Chriſtians into a brotherly intercourſe.

CHAP. XVI.—The laſt chapter contains a kind ſalutation to all his friends at Rome.

FROM the Apoſtle's chief deſign in this Epiſtle, which I have thus endeavoured to point out, I think it will appear, that he gives no encouragement to either of the opinions mentioned above.

The firſt is, that *we are juſtified by faith alone.* This ariſes from St. Paul's ſaying, (chap. iii. 28, and in other places,) *that a man is juſtified by faith, without the deeds of the law.* Whereas the Apoſtle's argument has evidently no reference to the ſolfidian opinion of *faith and works;* but merely (as I think it hath appeared) to the Chriſtian and Jewiſh religions. By *faith*, therefore, he means the goſpel—in oppoſition to *works*, by which he means the law of Moſes. To this ſenſe alſo the *context*, as well as the *argument*, leads. *Is he the God of the Jews only? Is he not the God alſo of the Gentiles?* As if he had ſaid, the law of Moſes might have been ſufficient, if the Jews only had been concerned; but the Gentiles require a wider diſpenſation.—It is ſingular alſo, that if the Apoſtle had meant to inculcate

culcate juſtification *by faith alone*, he ſhould take the opportunity of this very Epiſtle to employ three chapters on *good works*; among which *faith*, as an *end*, is not even once mentioned; though, no doubt, all theſe good works are ſuppoſed to ſpring from faith, as a *mean*.—It may be obſerved alſo, that the Apoſtle introduces all theſe good works under the beautiful metaphor of *offering up our bodies as living ſacrifices, holy and acceptable to God*; by which only can be meant, our hearts purified from ſinful affections, and reſtored to God's mercy through Chriſt by good works, which is the ſacrifice he requires.

The ſecond great error, which ſeems to ariſe from this Epiſtle, is that of *predeſtination*. The Apoſtle, we are told, urging the abſolute decrees of God, informs us, that God exerciſes the ſame power over man, which the potter exerciſes over his clay; that is, he decrees, merely in an arbitrary manner, one man to miſery, and another to happineſs; juſt as the potter makes one veſſel to honour, and another to diſhonour. But this is ſurely not the meaning of the figure. It is not meant to ſhew any predilection which the potter has for one lump more than for another, which it ought to ſhew, if it was meant to ex-

plain the arbitrary manner in which God is ſuppoſed to treat mankind. All that it is intended to ſhew, is merely the potter's power over the *whole maſs* of his clay. The Apoſtle's argument, therefore, leads him to conſider *nations*, not *individuals*, by the potter's clay; and that only in a worldly ſenſe, as they are ſubſervient to the ſchemes of God's economy in this world.—The argument indeed goes to *all nations*, and at all times. Accordingly we ſee, at this day, God is continually raiſing up one nation, and depreſſing another. They are all clay in the potter's hands; and, for his own wiſe reaſons, which we have no right to inveſtigate, he preſerves this control among them. But this control has nothing to do with the ſpiritual ſtate of *individuals*, which is not in the leaſt concerned: we are all left to *work out our own ſalvation* by ſuch means as the goſpel, or whatever other lights are allowed us, afford.—But at preſent, the Apoſtle has only to do with the Jews and Gentiles; both of whom are conſidered as clay in the hands of the potter, and puniſhed, or rewarded, according to their deſerts. *Veſſels of wrath fitted for deſtruction, and veſſels of mercy prepared unto glory*—are Jewiſh phraſes, merely to expreſs a ſtate of guilt, or a

ſtate

ſtate of religion; but in both caſes unconnected with any divine decree.—The caſe of Pharaoh wants more explanation. *For this cauſe, ſaith God, have I raiſed thee up, that I might ſhew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy; and whom he will, he hardeneth.* Now as we are expreſsly told, that God hardened Pharaoh merely to make his *power known, and his name to be declared throughout all the earth*, it is evident that the *inviſible hand* of God, acting by hardening his heart, could not have had this effect. It could not make God's *power known*, becauſe no one could know it. But when a wicked man *hardens himſelf*, God may *make his power known through all the earth*, by raiſing that wicked man to a high ſtation, and holding him out as an example to the world. Thus God's power and name were made known, by the great ſuperiority of the miracles of Moſes over the incantations of Pharaoh. When God, therefore, is repreſented as *hardening men's hearts*, it is only a Jewiſh mode of ſpeaking for leaving them at liberty to harden their own hearts, if they are ſo diſpoſed. It is a mode of ſpeaking equivalent to many paſſages

of ſcripture, eſpecially to that of Iſaiah, in which we are told that God *blinded the eyes of unbelievers, and hardened their hearts; leſt they ſhould ſee with their eyes, and underſtand with their hearts, and be converted, and healed.* Whereas ſurely nothing more was meant, than that they ſhould harden their own hearts.—In various parts of ſcripture alſo, men are ſaid to be placed in different circumſtances of life, to promote the glory of God. As at the death of Lazarus, our Saviour ſays, *This ſickneſs is not unto death, but that the Son of Man might be glorified*; and again, in the caſe of the blind man, *Neither hath this man ſinned*, ſaid our Saviour, *nor his parents; but that the works of God ſhould be made manifeſt in him.* God always, therefore, uſes man as his inſtrument; but in no caſe controls his ſpiritual concerns.

ILLUSTRATIONS

USED BY

ST. PAUL IN HIS WRITINGS.

Such Illuſtrations *examined, as are uſed by St. Paul in his Epiſtles.*

ST. Paul's language is rich: it abounds both with *metaphors*, and *illuſtrations*. A *metaphor* is merely an *alluſion*, in a ſingle word or expreſſion, transferring the ſenſe from its literal meaning, without purſuing the aſſumed ſenſe farther. As when St. Paul ſays, By one man *ſin entered* into the world. Such *alluſions* rather beautify and enrich a language, than explain a ſentiment. But when the alluſion is carried into length, we call it an *illuſtration*. In *metaphor*, St. Paul's language abounds ſo copiouſly, that it would be a work of labour to follow him. Of his principal *illuſtrations* I ſhall take notice.

ROMANS, vi. 16.

THE Apoſtle here perſonifies *Sin*, and *Righteouſneſs*; and illuſtrates their treatment of mankind under the idea of ſervitude. Obedience is the teſt of ſervitude; and all mankind, obeying either the one or the other of theſe two maſters, are neceſſarily in a ſtate of ſervitude. But the great difference between theſe two modes of ſervitude, is ſhewn in the wages which each holds out: the wages of ſin is death; while the wages of righteouſneſs is eternal life.

ROM. vii. 2.

THE next illuſtration we meet with, is intended to ſhew the Jew the propriety of his embracing chriſtianity, from the caſe of marriage. The woman, ſaith he, is bound to her huſband, while he liveth; but when he is dead, ſhe is at liberty to marry again. This, he tells the Jews, is exactly their caſe: they were married to the law; but the law being now dead, they are at perfect liberty to engage themſelves to the goſpel.

ROM. vii. 8.

IN this paſſage the Apoſtle again perſonifies *Sin*. He conſiders it as a being without any power in itſelf. Its connection with the commandment, is what alone gives it ſtrength. It may be connected with the law of nature—with the law of Moſes, or, with the law of the goſpel; and its power to do miſchief, is according to the ſtrength it receives from theſe ſeveral rules of duty. This connection the Apoſtle conſiders as its offenſive armour: I was alive, ſays he, till Sin, armed with the commandment, ſlew me.

ROM. ix. 21.

THE illuſtration here, taken from the *potter and his clay*, is borrowed from Jeremiah *. The prophet uſes it to illuſtrate God's intended dealings with the Jews. As the potter throws aſide ſuch veſſels as were injured in working, ſo will God throw aſide the Jewiſh nation, if it *do evil in his ſight*.

This illuſtration St. Paul carries a little farther. As the potter makes veſſels of various kinds, deſtined ſome to noble, and others to ignoble uſes; ſo God raiſes and depreſſes *nations*, ac-

* Jer. xxiii. 2.

cording to his own good pleaſure.——This illuſtration hath often been ill-uſed, and lifted into the cauſe of predeſtination, with which it hath no kind of connection. It is very plain, both from the prophet's uſe of it and the Apoſtle's, that it refers only to the *ſtate of nations in this world*—not, in any degree, to the *caſe of individuals in the next.*

ROM. xi. 17.

WE have here a very beautiful illuſtration, taken from ingrafting trees; with which art we find the Apoſtle was well acquainted.—The point to be explained was, the union of the Gentiles with the Jews, under chriſtianity. The Jews were the olive-tree; the grafts were both Gentiles and Jews; and the act of ingrafting, was the initiation of both into the chriſtian religion. The Jews are informed, that olive-branches may with greater eaſe be ingrafted into their own original ſtock, which is more natural and congenial to them.

The Gentiles again are reminded, that if the natural branches were not ſpared, becauſe of their unfruitfulneſs, much leſs ſhould they be ſpared, who were aliens to the Jewiſh ſtock, if they ſhould prove unfruitful.

I COR. iii. 6.

THE Apoſtle here illuſtrates the preaching of the goſpel, by an alluſion to the culture of plants. As in planting, ſays he, one man planteth, and another watereth; but God giveth the increaſe: ſo in preaching the goſpel, the apoſtles are merely labourers under God: they have only the power of him who planteth, and of him who watereth; they are mere inſtruments in the hands of God, to whom they look up entirely for a bleſſing upon their labours.

I COR. iii. 10.

IN this paſſage the Apoſtle illuſtrates his mode of preaching the goſpel, under the character of a maſter-builder. He lays the foundation of his building in Chriſt; which is the only true foundation, he ſays, that can be laid. On this foundation many people build, but with very different materials; ſome good, and others bad. But he exhorts them to take care what ſuperſtructure they raiſe: their work ſhall be brought to proof. The ſound materials will ſtand the teſt; but ſuch as are unſound, will fail and periſh.

1 COR. v. 6.

THE Apoſtle had ordered a wicked perſon to be excommunicated; the propriety of which ſentence he illuſtrates from the unleavened bread of the Jewiſh paſſover. He conſidered the wicked man as leaven; and ſhews the propriety of removing him, on the conſideration, that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.

1 COR. IX. 24.

IN this paſſage the Apoſtle illuſtrates the neceſſity of being in earneſt in our chriſtian courſe, by an alluſion to the games of the heathen. As the racers and wreſtlers, in thoſe games, fit themſelves for their different exerciſes, and each ſtrives zealouſly for victory; ſo ſhould the Chriſtian prepare himſelf for his religious courſe, and ſtrive for the victory in his great conteſt with the world.

1 COR. XII. 12.

THE Corinthian church had fallen into ſome diviſions and heart-burnings, with regard to the value of their ſpiritual gifts; and the Apoſtle illuſtrates the impropriety of ſuch diviſions, by a compariſon between the church and a human body.

body. The beauty and uſe of the human body conſiſts in a perfect union of all its parts. If we could ſuppoſe any part of the body to ſay, it did not belong to the body, the abſurdity would be ſtriking: they all make one whole. The eye, therefore, cannot ſay to the hand, nor the head to the feet, I have no need of you: they all together make one body—all have care one for another: if one ſuffer, all ſuffer: if one be honoured, all are honoured.—This is a juſt emblem of the unity, ſays the Apoſtle, which ſhould always be ſeen in the chriſtian church.

I COR. xiii. 11.

THE Apoſtle, in this paſſage, illuſtrates the growth of religious knowledge by the growth of a child. The child is pleaſed with every trifle; and thinks, and ſpeaks, without reaſon or diſcretion. As years advance, his reaſon begins to unfold: all his childiſh purſuits are thrown aſide, and the improvements of manhood come on.—Thus alſo the religious life increaſes. It begins from ſlender attainments; and, making its way to the heart and affections, fills them at length with heavenly love.

Now

Now we ſee through a glaſs darkly, ſays our tranſlation; in which the Apoſtle's illuſtration is much injured. I know not that the ancients had any glaſſes *through* which they examined objects. The glaſs here meant, is the ἔσοπτρον, or mirror; which, in ſome ſhape, they certainly had. It is the glaſs which St. James mentions, (i. 23.) and is mentioned alſo by ſeveral of the Greek claſſics. The Apoſtle is ſhewing how uncertainly we view ſpiritual objects; and illuſtrates his argument by a man's looking into a mirror; in which he does not ſee the real object, but only a repreſentation of it. When we ſhall be introduced to perfect viſion, we ſhall ſee ſpiritual objects not repreſented, as they now are, under a fictitious reſemblance, but as they really are.

1 COR. xiv. 7.

THE gift of ſpeaking with tongues ſeems to have been improperly uſed in the Corinthian church, and the Apoſtle here takes occaſion to reſtrain it. If the unknown tongue was not explained, it would be unintelligible and uſeleſs.—This the Apoſtle illuſtrates by muſical ſounds. Unleſs the pipe, or the harp, give its proper notes,

notes, the movements they were meant to excite are uncertain. The ſoldier's motion is directed by the trumpet; but if the trumpet do not give the ſound, he expects his motions, of courſe, are left undecided.

1 COR. XV. 36.

ST. Paul, in this noble chapter, in which he conſiders the reſurrection of the dead, introduces a ſceptical reaſoner, inquiring, how the dead are raiſed? and with what body they come? The Apoſtle reaſons with him from analogy; and illuſtrates the reſurrection of the dead by a grain of corn, which he calls upon his opponent to conſider. It is buried, ſays he, in the earth, where it dies, and turns to corruption; but there is a principle of life in it, which revives, ſprings again, and opens into a greatly ſuperior form.

2 COR. iii. 13.

THE Apoſtle is here ſhewing the excellence of the chriſtian religion over the Jewiſh. This excellence he illuſtrates by the veil which Moſes threw over his face, (Ex. xxxiv. 33.) and which, the Apoſtle ſays, ſhewed that ſomething was behind,

hind, not yet diſcovered. This was the new covenant, from which the veil was entirely removed.

2 COR. V. 1.

THE Apoſtle, ſpeaking of our removal from this world to the next, illuſtrates the happineſs of it, by the idea of removing from a mean houſe to a ſplendid one. When our earthly houſe, ſays he, ſhall be diſſolved, we ſhall have a building of God—a houſe not made with hands —eternal in the heavens.

2 COR. viii. 15.

THE Apoſtle, ſpeaking of the liberality of one part of the chriſtian church to another, (all of which were then equally under a ſtate of perſecution,) recommends an equality alſo in circumſtances; reciprocally relieving each other, as each abounded, or was neceſſitous. This inſtruction he illuſtrates by God's mode of diſpenſing manna in the wilderneſs. *They who had gathered much, had nothing over; and they who had gathered little, had no lack.*

2 COR. X. 3.

THE Apoſtle, ſpeaking of his mode of oppoſing wickedneſs, recommends ſuch ſpiritual weapons as are proper to perform the warlike operations of beating down every thing that oppoſed the knowledge of God; pulling down ſtrong holds, and bringing into captivity all the oppoſers of the goſpel of Chriſt.

2 COR. X. 12.

A MODE of religious compariſon, uſual in the world, is here found fault with—that of comparing ourſelves with ourſelves; or, perhaps, rather with other people; by which we can never come at the truth. The Apoſtle illuſtrates what he ſays, under the idea of a certain meaſure, which every man ought to have to aſcertain his actions. This meaſure, or rule, God hath given us in the ſcripture; and beyond this meaſure (as he phraſes it) *we ſhould not ſtretch ourſelves*.

GAL. iii. 24.

THE Apoſtle, ſpeaking of the introduction of the goſpel by the law, illuſtrates it under the idea of a ſchoolmaſter. Before the goſpel ap-

peared, he ſays, we were kept under the diſcipline of the law: but the law introducing us to the goſpel, became, as it were, our ſchoolmaſter. After the goſpel appeared, we were no longer under tutorage.

GAL. iv. 1.

THE Apoſtle, in this chapter, uſes much the ſame kind of illuſtration, and on nearly the ſame ſubject, as he did in the laſt. The Jew, who is the heir of the promiſes, while he continues under the law, may be ſaid to be under tutorage; but when the goſpel appeared, he became of age, and received the adoption of a ſon.

GAL. iv. 22.

THE bondage of the law is here contraſted with the freedom of the goſpel; which the Apoſtle illuſtrates by the children of Agar and Sarah. Iſhmael, the ſon of Hagar, repreſented the Jews; Iſaac, the ſon of Sarah, repreſented the children of the promiſe. The event was, that the ſon of the bond-woman was caſt out, and the ſon of the free-woman made the heir.

GAL. vi. 7.

THE Apoſtle, ſpeaking here of the conſequence of our good and bad actions, illuſtrates his ſubject by the ſowing of corn. We always reap of the kind we ſow. If we ſow weeds, weeds will be the only produce; but if we ſow good ſeed, we ſhall reap alſo good ſeed. The Apoſtle then adviſes the good Chriſtian not to be diſcouraged, or to ſlack his diligence, but to go on in his pious endeavours; aſſuring himſelf, that if he hath ſown good ſeed, he ſhall certainly reap it in due ſeaſon.

EPHES. ii. 19.

THE Apoſtle, deſcribing the bleſſed ſtate of thoſe who are confirmed in their religion, compares them to a houſe ſolidly founded, and well built. The foundation is laid in prophecy, and apoſtolic preaching; Jeſus Chriſt being the corner-ſtone, connecting the different parts of the building together. The whole fabric thus framed, is formed into a holy temple, dedicated to God, and inhabited by his Holy Spirit.

EPHES. iv. 15.

THE growth of religion is here illuſtrated by the natural growth of the human body. The

body, *fitly joined together*, and united in all its parts, groweth into the perfect man. Thus, too, the religious growth of the ſoul is carried on: it acquires more and more ſtrength, till it come, as the apoſtle expreſſes it, to *the perfect ſtature of the fulneſs of Chriſt.*

EPHES. v. 22.

THE Apoſtle here illuſtrates the unity between Chriſt and his church by marriage. As the huſband is the head of the wife, ſo is Chriſt of the church; as the wife is ſubject to her huſband, ſo ought the church to be to Chriſt; as the wife ſhould make herſelf appear in all lights pleaſing to her huſband, ſo ſhould the church, by holineſs, appear to Chriſt; as a man ſhould leave his father and mother, and be joined to his wife, ſo ſhould the good Chriſtian give up every thing for the ſake of religion; laſtly, as marriage is indiſſoluble, ſo is the connection between Chriſt and his holy ſervants.

EPHES. vi. 11.

THE Chriſtian is here exhorted to bear up under all the difficulties of his religious warfare, and is properly armed by the Apoſtle for the conteſt. His *heart*, in which all chriſtian virtues

ſhould

ſhould dwell, muſt be defended by a breaſt-plate of righteouſneſs; and this muſt be bound tight around him by a girdle of truth: his *head* will be ſecured againſt all wicked opinions, by the helmet of ſalvation—which is the hope of a bleſſed immortality: his feet muſt be guarded by greaves, prepared by the goſpel of peace, which will protect him againſt all the rough obſtacles which may offend him in his chriſtian march. But his grand defence will be the ſhield of faith, which will be oppoſed to irreligion, and vice of every kind. The only offenſive weapon put into his hand, is the ſword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: with this he will be able to vanquiſh all who oppoſe him.

PHILIP. iii. 13.

ST. Paul, exhorting his Philippian converts to continue in their chriſtian courſe, ſets before them his own example, which he illuſtrates by an alluſion to the Grecian games. Notwithſtanding his endeavours to perform the duties of religion, he tells them, he thought he had by no means yet attained perfection. There was always a point before him, which he found he could not reach. Like a racer, however, he ardently

continued his courſe; not looking back to the ground he had already paſſed, but preſſing on to the goal before him, that he might obtain the glorious prize which was promiſed as the reward of his perſeverance.

COLOSS. ii. 19.

SOME idea of worſhipping angels having gotten into the Coloſſian church, the Apoſtle rebukes his converts for ſuffering themſelves to be ſo miſled. He illuſtrates his argument by an alluſion to the human body. Would any of you, ſays he, conſider the *limbs* as ſuperior to the *head?* Equally abſurd is it to pay that reſpect to angels, who are only miniſtering ſpirits, which you pay to the great Creator himſelf.

1 THESS. v. 2.

THE Apoſtle, giving his Theſſalonian converts ſome inſtruction with regard to the reſurrection of the dead, illuſtrates what he ſaid by an alluſion, which our Saviour had made before, to the coming of a thief in the night. As the ſuddenneſs of his coming prevents all knowledge of his approach; ſo will the day of judgment ſurprize mankind in a manner equally unex-

pected. Preparation againſt a thief ſhould be made before his approach, to prevent a ſurprize; ſo ſhould it be made againſt the day of judgment.

2 TIM. ii. 20.

THE Apoſtle is here ſpeaking of ſome corrupt members of the church, among whom were Hymeneus and Philetus. His obſervation is, that no church can be ſo pure, as not to have in it ſeveral corrupt members; and this he illuſtrates by the furniture of a great houſe. In ſuch a houſe veſſels of every kind will always be found: there will be many of gold, and of ſilver; but among them, others of wood and of clay.

HEB. iii. 2.

ST. Paul is here ſpeaking of the excellency of Chriſt; and illuſtrates his character by comparing him with Moſes. Moſes was faithful in the truſt to which he had been appointed; but the appointment of Chriſt was as much ſuperior to that of Moſes, as the architect is ſuperior to the houſe he builds. The Apoſtle intimates by this compariſon, that Chriſt was the grand architect, who founded the goſpel upon the law.

HEB. V. 12.

THE Apoſtle, reproving ſome of his converts for the little improvement they had made in religious knowledge, illuſtrates his reproof by comparing them to children, who were yet fed with milk. He expected to have found them now arrived at man's eſtate; and that, inſtead of milk they might have uſed a ſtronger diet.

HEB. vi. 7.

THE Apoſtle is here ſhewing the abuſe of God's Holy Spirit, which all men equally may turn to their advantage, if they pleaſe. This doctrine he illuſtrates by rain: the ſhowers of heaven fall equally on all the earth; but while one part brings forth fruit for the ſervice of man, another part beareth thorns and briers, whoſe end is to be burned.

HEB. xii. 5.

THE Apoſtle having obſerved, that ſome of his converts had not properly ſubmitted to thoſe trials, which their profeſſion led them to undergo, expoſtulates with them on the ſubject, and ſhews them the propriety of ſubmitting to all the diſpenſations of God. They were all, he tells

tells them, intended for their religious improvement. This he illuſtrates by an alluſion to our earthly fathers; and his argument is, that if the fatherly correction of our earthly parent, who muſt often be fallible, hath its advantages, of how much greater advantage muſt be the correction of our heavenly Father, *which yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteouſneſs to them who are exerciſed thereby.*

HEB. xii. 18.

THE Apoſtle, ſhewing the mild and gentle nature of the goſpel, illuſtrates his ſubject by a view of thoſe circumſtances of terror which accompanied the giving of the law. So *terrible was the ſight*, that even Moſes himſelf ſaid, *I exceedingly fear and quake.* Whereas the goſpel, inſtead of terrifying us, introduces us to Mount Sion, where we are received into the *city of the living God*, and join the *company of angels*, and the *ſpirits of juſt men made perfect.*

THE END.

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